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GLORIA

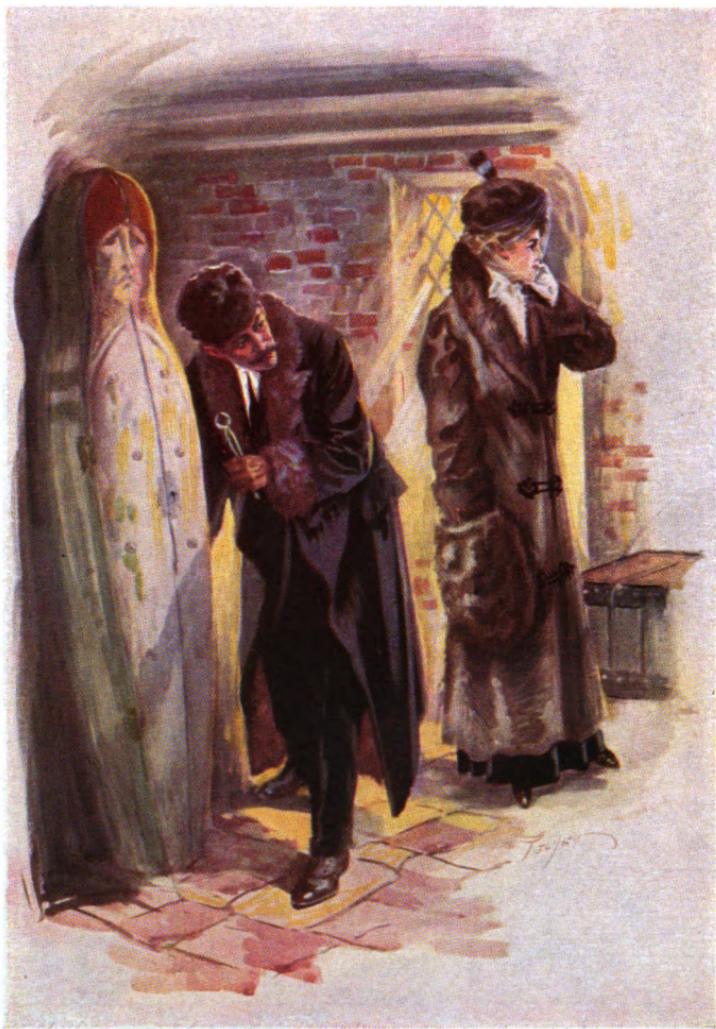
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G·Frederic Turner

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A. W. Fish.
Bradford,
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GLORIA



**“I’ve got some sort of an idea,” he said at length
(page 122)**

GLORIA

BY

G. FREDERIC TURNER, M.A.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR

By C. M. RELYEÀ



NEW YORK
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1910

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ILLUSTRATIONS

"I've got some sort of an idea," he said
at length (page 122) *Frontispiece*

"The lady wants to be seen home—
and I'm going to do it if I swing
for it!" facing page 66

"If I see so much as an inch of blade,
this little hand-grenade of mine
will play havoc with your hand-
some features" " " 182

"I drink to our success to-night, I
drink to the devil in the devil's own
tipple" " " 308

CHAPTER ONE

THE PATIENT AND HIS DOCTOR

CHRISTMAS Eve in New York! Broadway crowded with happy playgoers, gay promenaders, and belated shoppers! Fifth Avenue resplendent with an abundance of commercially-conceived festivity in the overstocked windows of its fashionable shops! In other and less pretentious localities, gaunt lines of assassinated turkeys exhibiting their sallow nudities in indecent profusion to a steady stream of ever-changing faces! In short, everywhere throughout the big city, the people holding high carnival—even cynicism forgetting itself in the prospect of gallinaceous food and crude sweet-meats. And Central Park West and the Circle, in particular, scintillating with electrical display and wreaths of red-ribboned holly.

In the New Theatre a gala performance of *Antony and Cleopatra* was nearly over; the last lines of the tragedy were being spoken. Yet, notwithstanding the fact that in another moment the folds of the red velvet curtains would descend on the Egyptian scene, an occupant of one of the stalls, no longer able to control his impatience, hastily left his seat and started up the adjoining aisle.

To say that this young man gave every physiognomical indication of being a soul in distress would

be putting it not a bit too strongly. Nor would it have required exceptionally brilliant intuitive faculties to conjecture that someone—presumably in a box across the theatre, on which, all through the evening, his eyes had been riveted—had shamelessly robbed him of his heart. Moreover, judging from his evident haste and the keen anxiety with which all the way up the aisle he followed every movement of the parties in the box, it would seem that he had determined to intercept them on their way out. And, indeed, such was his determination. Life had concentrated itself into a question of hearing from the lips of the woman,—the woman to whom he had offered, and who had refused, the worship of a life,—a word that he could interpret as meaning that there was still a faint possibility of her changing her mind.

To his vexation, however, he found that others likewise had left their seats. In fact, the general exodus had already set in before, even, he had reached the top of the aisle. And yet, despite his being thoroughly aware that any attempt to pass from one side of the house to the other was sure to be resented,—so delirious is the haste in which a metropolitan audience takes leave of the theatre for the invariable restaurant-supper after the play,—he continued to make strenuous efforts to cut his way through, until realising, finally, that it was useless, he let himself be borne along by the crowd. But his chance came when the carriage-vestibule on Sixty-Fifth Street was reached. And there, quick to take advantage of an almost imperceptible cessation of the onward movement—consequent

upon the people searching the ingeniously-devised board to ascertain whether the desired motors or carriages headed the long line—he again started in to elbow his way through the crush; and so successfully this time that presently comparatively few persons separated him from an undeniably blond and dashing young woman, in a magnificent opera-cloak of Russian sables, who was laughing and chatting with half a dozen or more vapid youths while following the lead of a portly and somewhat red-faced old gentleman.

Now, though unusual—for want of a better word—as was the young man's behaviour, few people in this scene of orderly confusion, babel of voices and distant humming of motors, gave more than momentary attention to it except the young woman's escort. To these wondrous wise young gentlemen, however, the meaning of his frantic exertions to reach her side was all too plain, no less her feelings towards him; and, exchanging significant glances, they began to nudge one another to watch for the dénouement of the little comedy which was rapidly developing before their eyes.

But alas for the futility of his brave resolutions . . . !

So far his task had been easy enough. But at the fateful moment, face to face with his divinity, and doubtless for the first time perceiving that no relenting glance softened the faultless contours of her carven features, that no spark of warmth glinted in her big, blue eyes,—eyes that, on the contrary, were brimful of scornful laughter,—his indomitable spirit failed him utterly, was crushed, for once, at least, and he stood

gaping at her, to everyone's surprise, more like a country yokel than the man-of-the-world that he undoubtedly was. For the briefest of intervals he remained thus. And then, apparently pulling himself together, he suddenly wheeled round on his heel, and shouldering his way through the press,—heedless alike of a friendly hail, which came in an unmistakably English accent from someone back in the crowd, and of the protesting looks, if not words, of the people he jostled,—he left an ostentatiously, almost vulgarly, ornate limousine to slam its door and move rapidly away with its fair occupant and her admirers.

Into Central Park West the young man turned and walked north. Despite a heavy fur overcoat, his gait was extraordinarily fast, and his face appeared white, almost ghastly, in the thin, yellow fog that was pushing its way under his eyelids, into the penetralia of nose and ears, and depositing superfluous matter on his lungs, larynx, and reckless expanse of linen. A few blocks above the theatre he came to a small apartment-hotel, mounted at a run to the first floor, and quickly entering the sitting-room of the suite, he carelessly tossed his irreproachable high hat on to a lounge. Then he went over to a window and stood gazing out at the sea of fog before drawing the curtain against the gamboge of the December evening. And his countenance was at once savage and inexpressibly sad.

This savageness was habitual, the resultant of bold features: a straight nose which made a sharp angle with the steep brow, bushy eyebrows and a wiry, brush-backed moustache that sprouted aggressively from his

upper lip. Strictly speaking it was not a handsome face, though, perhaps, a striking one. Nor in other respects was there anything remarkable about George Trafford—"Nervy" Trafford they had called him at Harvard, and the appellation had always clung to him. As to occupation he had none. Inheriting a modest fortune at an early age, his life had differed little from that of the majority of young Americans in like circumstances, if we except the fact that—before he took up the difficult task of killing time—he had added an Oxford degree to that of Harvard.

Throwing off his coat, Trafford fumbled in his waist-coat for a key. A moment later he was opening a small mahogany medicine-cupboard that was fixed against the wall over his book-case. His searching hand groped about in its recesses and then brought out—something. For a second he held this "something" at arms length, conning it with curious eyes, as a dilettante might study a precious cameo, or a bit of rare porcelain.

Then he put it carefully on the table. The electric light shone on a small, compact object, dark of colour and sinister of shape—a revolver!

Nervy Trafford took pen and paper and wrote; and as he wrote the curious light grew in his wild eyes, and a sad smile played about his sensitive mouth.

"Dearest," he began:—"You say you can never love me. I say that I can never cease to love you. You have spoken a lie, even as I have spoken the truth, for when the mists of life are dispelled by the glorious radiance beyond the grave, you will love me as I love

*you, perfectly, entirely, with the triple majesty of soul,
mind and spirit. Till then, farewell.*

Yours, as you are mine,

GEORGE TRAFFORD."

Having read this curious epistle twice, he put it in an envelope and addressed it to Miss Angela Knox, St. Regis Hotel. A moment later he took up the object from the table, looking into vacancy as he did so.

So this was to be his end!—an ending, he well knew, that none of his friends had ever dreamed of. A man on whom advice was thrown away, who seldom if ever thought twice, in other words, a creature of impulse, yes—they would admit all that; but on the other hand would they not recall many instances of his extricating himself from tight places through nothing else but this very impulsiveness and nerve of his? Inevitably, then, they would refuse to believe that a man like that, however hopeless his infatuation, would take his own life. All of which merely goes to show how ridiculous it is for our best friends to scoff at the notion that an affair of the heart may be taken seriously.

Trafford's face was literally bloodless; his pupils infinitesimal black dots, gazing searchingly through the walls of his room into the great beyond, where all questions are answered, all doubts set at rest. For a moment he stood thus in vibrant silence. Then,—as if his mute searching had received its dumb response,—his lips breathed a woman's name, the muzzle of the revolver was raised head high, there was a click—and nothing more than a click!

Trafford's arm fell limp to his side, and a look of

sick pain shuddered across his face. Then, an idea, a wafted air of recollection, fanned the light of understanding into his dull eyes. A ghost of a smile hovered at the corner of his lips, and again the cold hand raised the deadly mechanism to his pulsing temple. Even as it did so the door of his room was opened, and with a gesture of annoyance Trafford tossed the unused weapon on to the table and facing the intruder burst out with:

“Who on earth——”

“Hullo, Nervy, old chap!” was the familiar greeting that came from a big and genial man, clean-shaved, about thirty years of age, and dressed seasonably in a dark, astrachan-trimmed overcoat. In a word, the speaker was a faultlessly attired Englishman, whose great frame and smiling features seemed to bring into the tragic atmosphere a most desirable air of commonplace.

“Bob Saunders!” ejaculated Trafford.

“The same,” affirmed the other, throwing off his overcoat and sinking lazily into the most comfortable chair he could find; “Robert Saunders, old cricket blue, devoted husband of a peerless wife, the friend of kings and the king of friends—*voila!*”

By this time Trafford had composed himself sufficiently to ask:

“What in the deuce are you doing over here? How did you find——”

“Been camping on your trail, old man,—as you Yankees say,” interrupted the Englishman. “In the first place, the wife and I have been doing the States. To-night, as we were leaving the New Theatre, I

caught sight of you—sung out to you—but you were off like a shot. I put Mrs. Saunders—divine creature!—into a taxi and sent her to the hotel. Then I gave chase. I tracked you here, and your door being open, took the liberty to walk in. But you don't look well, old chap!" he went on, noticing at length the exceptional pallor of his friend's face. "You look rotten! What's up, Nervy? Liver? Money?"

Trafford pointed silently to the table; at the sight of the revolver Saunders' face grew grave.

"As bad as that?" he asked. He was genuinely shocked, but his tone was commonplace, almost casual.

"As bad as that," breathed Trafford.

Saunders caught sight of the envelope, glanced at the address and at once proceeded to open it.

"Stop!" cried Trafford imperiously. "That is not for your eyes."

"Oh, yes it is," returned Saunders bluntly, extracting the letter from its envelope. "Sit down, sick man, and wait until I have diagnosed your case."

Trafford watched the Englishman with fascinated eyes. In his hour of deep darkness this smiling, confident, almost too well-dressed embodiment of prosperity seemed strangely comforting and reposeful. For the briefest of moments his present surroundings were blotted out, and his mind rushed back through the intervening years to the glorious days when they were both undergraduates at Oxford. But the illusion was of short duration, the awakening bitter. For as Saunders read, a smile eloquent of contemptuous astonishment spread over his face.

"Angela Knox!" he exclaimed. "My dear, demented friend, what a *bétisse!*"

"The purest, most perfect specimen of womanhood——"

"Angela Knox!" repeated Saunders cruelly. "Ye gods! Oh, yes, I know the lady. We met her at Newport—a big, buxom blonde, with the intellect of a sparrow. Tissue, tissue, my boy, and no soul! Features, millions also, I concede, but no sense of humour. In six weeks she would bore you; in six months you would bore her; in a year the machinery of the law—your obliging American divorce courts——"

"Silence!" roared Trafford. "You would poke fun at the holiest corner of a man's heart. I tell you, Bob, I so love this woman that had it not been for a miracle, I should have died five minutes ago with her name on my lips."

"And I'm the miracle?" questioned Saunders, tapping himself lightly on his faultless waistcoat.

"Miracle number two," replied the American, sinking into a chair. "That gun was kept for burglars. To preclude the possibility of an accident through some fool of a servant's mishandling, I kept the first chamber empty. Idiot that I am!—I forgot the precaution. But a second and doubtless more conclusive attempt would have been made had not you butted in——"

"And for Angela Knox!" cried Saunders with an unfeeling grin. "Now had it been a brunette——"

"This is no joking matter. For Heaven's sake, do be serious!"

Saunders brushed a speck of mud off his patent-leather boots.

"So I'm to take you seriously, Nervy? Well, then, listen, my dear, irresponsible, melodramatic friend. Love is a wonderful thing. It is rightly considered the beginning and the end of all things. I say so, *moi qui vous parle*, though I've been married nearly two years. But this infatuation—this calf-love of yours for a hypertrophied blonde with the conversational powers of a turnip, is, *ipso facto*, ridiculous. You will love some day, friend of my youth, but if your love is unrequited you will not turn to the revolver for solace."

"What are you letting me in for?" asked the bewildered Trafford. A powerful reaction had left him weak—weak in voice and weak in spirit.

"I mean," went on Saunders with slow emphasis, "that if you demand what your heart really desires and the response is 'no,' you will, in the words of the prehistoric doggerel, try, try again. Love that accepts defeat is an unhealthy passion; Love that tries to find relief in death is a disease. You are diseased, *cher ami*. Buck up! and listen to the words of your good doctor."

"I'm listening," said Trafford somewhat sheepishly.

"Good! To begin with, you are sound physically. Muscles firm, energy splendid, and your tongue would probably shame a hot-house geranium. But your psychic self is out of gear. Wheels are racing in your poor old brain! Little troubles become great tragedies! Vital things seem small and insignificant! You need a potent remedy."

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"Let it come over speedy then!" the American replied with some show of interest.

For a moment the Englishman looked mystified. Presently he answered:

"You need to live in the open—plenty of sunshine and perfect air."

"All kibosh—buncombe!" broke forth Trafford petulantly.

"No, not buncombe, but Grimland—a little country on the borders of Austria and Russia. Visit it," went on Saunders in rousing tones. "Its highlands furnish the finest scenery in Europe. The air of its mountains is sparkling champagne! Its skies are purest sapphire, its snows whiter than sheets of finest lawn! To dwell there is to be a giant refreshed with wine, a sane man with a sane mind, and a proper contempt for amorous contretemps. Come, pack up your traps to-night and catch the *Lusitania* to-morrow. What's more, I do not advise, I command."

The American appeared half persuaded by the other's mastery. He sat upright, and looked more or less alive again.

"But I should be bored to death," he objected feebly.

"Not a bit of it! Why, old man, you'll forget the very meaning of the word boredom. You're a skater? —well, then, why not enter for the King's Cup which is skated for on the King's birthday—the second Saturday of the New Year at Weidenbruck. If you're beaten, as is probable,—for the Grimlanders are a nation of skaters,—there is tobogganing, curling, ski-ing

and hockey-on-the-ice to engross your mind. All are exhilarating, most are dangerous. Furthermore, you will have my society—as my wife and I will be guests of King Karl at the Neptunberg. However, for you, since you have not my advantages, I recommend the Hôtel Concordia. You will sail with us to-morrow?" he wound up confidently.

Trafford made a gesture of impatience.

"Honestly," he said, ignoring the question, "when the hammer of that gun clicked against my forehead, something also seemed to click inside my brain. Up to that point I had love framed up as all there was to this world and the next. Now I feel there is no meaning in anything."

"Wait till you've got a pair of skates on your feet and the breath of zero air in your nostrils! Wait till you've had a toss or two ski-ing, and a spill on the 'Kastel' toboggan run! There will be meaning enough in things then."

"It's a go, then!" declared Trafford, but without enthusiasm. "I'll make a getaway."

Saunders rose, a look of genuine relief on his face.

"The *Lusitania* to-morrow," he said in far heartier tones than he had yet employed. "Till then——" He held the other's hand in a long grip.

"And you don't balk at leaving me with that?" Trafford pointed with a pale smile at the revolver on the table.

"Not in the least," laughed Saunders. "Take it abroad with you. Only, get out of the habit of leaving the first chamber empty. Such a practice might be fatal in Grimland."

CHAPTER TWO

THE CITY OF THE PLAIN

"I CAN'T see that this is such a vast improvement on little old New York!" was Trafford's growling comment as he strolled the streets of Weidenbruck the evening of his arrival.

"Ah, but Weidenbruck is the city of the plain!" returned Saunders, who was accompanying him in his perambulations. "As soon as this skating competition is over——"

"It will be back to Broadway for mine, I think!" interrupted the American, and then went on with despondent logic: "If it is cold here, what will it be five thousand feet higher up?"

"Hot," retorted the other. "At Weissheim the sun shines unobscured by mist. The air there is dry and bracing. The thermometer may stand at zero, but your warm gloves will be a mockery, your great coat an offence."

A gust from a side street blew a whirl of powdered snow in the faces of the two men. Trafford buried his chin in the warm collar of his overcoat; he swore, but without undue bitterness. The cold indeed was poignant, for the unfrozen flood of the Niederkessel lent the atmosphere a touch of moisture that gave malice to the shrill frost, a penetrating venom to the spiteful breeze

that swept the long length and broad breadth of the straight, prosaic Bahnofstrasse. The trams that rushed noisily up and down this thoroughfare were the only things that still moved on wheels. Cabs, carriages, omnibuses, perambulators even, had discarded wheels in favour of runners; and arc-lamps shone coldly from an interminable line of iron masts, while a cheerier glow blazed from the windows of innumerable shops which still displayed their attractive wares for the benefit of the good citizens of Weidenbruck, who have raised the science of wrapping up to the level of a fine art.

"But then why come to this cellar of a town?" grunted Trafford.

Saunders shot a glance at his companion. He was genuinely fond of Trafford, had been genuinely shocked at the narrowness of his escape from tragic ruin, and was genuinely glad when his morbid companion began to take intelligent interest in his surroundings,—even though that interest manifested itself in irritable comments and deprecatory grunts. The Englishman had chaffed the would-be suicide, had poured cruel scorn on his inamorata, and preached the cold gospel of worldliness and selfish pleasure; but if he had spoken cynically it had been because cynicism had seemed the right remedy, rather than because his own nature was bitter. Beyond having a rather high opinion of his own abilities and a predilection for new clothes, Saunders was a man of much merit.

"Because this skating competition happens to be held here," he answered, "and the King's Cup is the important event in the sporting calendar of Grimland.

The winner—who may be yourself—is looked upon as a king among men, a demi-god to be honoured with the burnt offerings of the rich and the bright glances of the fair.”

“The latter I can dispense with. Cut it out!” the American exclaimed with much bitterness, and then went on: “I did not come to Grimland merely for sport, as you well know, but because you hinted at political troubles. Moreover, I have taken your advice literally, and have brought my gun along.”

“Keep it loaded then,” said Saunders curtly. “I hear Father Bernhardt has returned.”

“Who in thunder is Father Bernhardt?”

“A renegade priest. In the troubles of 1904 he eloped with the Queen, who had been plotting her husband’s downfall with the Schattenbergs.”

“His Majesty’s opposition,” put in Trafford, who knew something of the country’s turbid history.

“Yes, kinsmen of King Karl’s who have always cherished a secret claim to the throne. They very nearly made their claim good, too, in 1904.”

“Only one Robert Saunders intervened,” interjected Trafford with an envious glance at his companion.

“Providence upheld the ruling dynasty with a firm hand,” Saunders went on to explain, “and the rebellious family, the Schattenbergs, were pretty well wiped out in the process. Two alone survived:—Prince Stephan,—who was too young to participate in the trouble, and who subsequently died of diphtheria at Weissheim,—and the Princess Gloria,—a girl of one-and-twenty, who escaped over the Austrian frontier.”

"And what is she doing?" inquired Trafford with some approach to curiosity.

"No one exactly knows. Unless she has altered in three years, she is a beautiful young woman. She lives in the public imagination partly because she is a possible alternative to King Karl, who has the demerit of being a respectable middle-aged man. If,—as is rumoured,—she is in alliance with Father Bernhardt, there will certainly be trouble, for the ex-priest is a man of energy and resource. Moreover, he was once a religious man, and believed himself damned when he ran away with King Karl's fickle consort; and a man who is looking forward to eternal damnation is as dangerous in his way as a Moslem fanatic seeking Paradise."

Trafford said nothing, but breathed a silent prayer that the renegade priest might indeed be in Grimland. For Trafford was one of those curiously constituted people—rarer now than they used to be—who value excitement without counting the cost. At Oxford he had always regarded Saunders with a deep, if unmalicious envy. The Englishman had captured the highest honours, had won his cricket blue, performing prodigies at Lord's before enthusiastic men and women; and, later, had played a conspicuous, almost heroic, part in the Grimland troubles of 1904. On the other hand, he, Trafford—Nervy Trafford—had to be content both at Harvard and Oxford with only limited athletic successes, these being achieved by sheer pluck and infectious energy. But men had always loved him, for he could sing a rousing song, dance a spirited war-

dance, and kindle bonfires in unexpected places with the most expensive furniture. In a word, his was an ardent, effervescent nature, and now that the tragedy of a tumultuous but misplaced passion had robbed life of its normal interest and savour, his ideas of a diverting holiday were of a distinctly reckless nature.

Wandering down the Bahnhofstrasse they purchased a few picture-postcards at a stationer's, a meerschaum pipe at an elegant tobacconist's where they sold Hamburg cigars in Havana boxes, and finally halted before a big corner shop where all the paraphernalia appertaining to winter sports were displayed in interesting and attractive profusion.

"I thought you had a good pair of skates," said Saunders.

"So I have," returned the other. "But there are two styles of skating, the English and the continental; and I am one of those rarely gifted Americans who can skate both styles equally well,—a fact I intend to take advantage of at this competition. But I need a different pair of skates for each style."

"Do you think you're really any good?" asked Saunders, smiling. He was accustomed to refer to his own abilities in eulogistic terms, but was not used to his companion doing so.

"If you were to ask that question in Onondaga, New York, U. S. A.,—where I was born and bred,—they'd laugh at you," was Trafford's serious reply.

"All right, let's go in and buy something from Frau Krabb," said Saunders, leading the way into the shop.

Within was a jumble of wooden *luges*, steel-framed toboggans, and granite curling stones; from the low ceiling hung numberless pairs of skis, like stalactites from a cavern roof; while bunches of skates adorned the balusters of the deep staircase leading to the upper floor.

Frau Krabb, the proprietress, was being accosted by another customer. The customer in question was a young officer in the shiny shako and a fine fur-trimmed sur-coat of grey-blue, frogged with black. He was a sufficiently attractive object in his picturesque uniform, but though his carriage was energetic and manly, the face that showed beneath the military headgear was by no means that of a typical soldier. It was a dark, oval face with a wisp of a black moustache, big lustrous eyes, and a small, pretty mouth, adorned with the whitest and most regular of teeth. It was a proud, sensitive face, more remarkable for its beauty than its strength, but for all that, good to behold for its intelligence, refinement, and glow of youthful health.

"Good-evening, Frau Krabb," began the soldier, genially saluting. "Are my skates ready yet?"

"They were ready at four o'clock, as promised, Herr Captain," replied the woman, a plump person with more fat than features.

The Captain passed his finger critically along the edge of the newly-ground blades, and expressed himself satisfied.

"And you will win the King's Cup, Herr Captain, of course?" continued Frau Krabb, smiling a fat smile into her customer's face.

"I'm going to have a good try at it," was the guarded reply. "I'd sooner win the King's Cup than the Colonelyc of the Guides. No one has practised his 'rocking turns' and 'counters' so assiduously as I, and I'm feeling as fit as a fiddle—which counts for more than a little in a skating competition."

"You look it," said the woman admiringly.

"I've got to meet Franz Schmolder of Wurzdorf," went on the soldier musingly, "and Captain Einstein of the 14th, so it does not do to be too confident. There's an American, too, competing; but I don't fear him. He doubtless skates only in the English fashion, and their style of skating is too stiff and stilted to be of any use in elaborate figures, though it is pretty enough for big, simple movements and combined skating. Schmolder's the man I fear, though Einstein's a big and powerful skater, with the nerve of a demon."

"Herr Schmolder has a strained knee," said the woman, "and Captain Einstein's nerve is not so good as it was. He is too fond of Rhine wine and Kirsch-wasser, and though he has a big frame it is not full of the best stuffing."

"I'd like to win better than anything in the world," said the young officer in tones of the deepest earnestness, his eyes lighting up wonderfully at the golden prospect.

"You *will* win," said Frau Krabb simply; "I have two kronen with my man on you, and you have my prayers."

"God answer them!" said the soldier piously. Then

in a moment of enthusiasm he bent down and kissed the comical upturned face of the old shopwoman. "Pray for me with all your soul," he said, "for I want that cup, Mother of Heaven! I must have that cup." And, slinging his skates over his shoulder the officer was about to leave the shop, when Saunders accosted him.

"Hullo, Von Hügelweiler!" said the latter.

The soldier's eyes brightened with recognition. He had met the Englishman at Weissheim a few years previously, and was proud of the acquaintance, for Saunders was a name to conjure with in Grimland.

"Herr Saunders!" he cried, "I am charmed to meet you again. You are his Majesty's guest, I presume."

"I am at the Neptunburg, yes. Permit me to present my friend, Herr Trafford, of New York. Trafford, my friend, Ulrich Salvator von Hügelweiler, Captain in his Majesty's third regiment of Guides."

The two shook hands.

"Delighted to make your acquaintance," said the Grimlander. "But what are you requiring at Frau Krabb's?"

"Some skates for to-morrow's competition," replied Trafford.

"Himmel!" ejaculated Hügelweiler, "so you are the American competitor. You had better not ask me to choose your skates, or I should certainly select a faulty pair."

Trafford laughed.

"You are indeed a dangerous rival," he said.

"I wish to succeed," said the soldier simply. "Per-

haps success means more to me than to you; but I don't think I am a bad sportsman."

"I will not tempt your probity," said Trafford. "I will select my own wares."

Von Hügelweiler waited till the purchase was complete,—expressing his approval of the other's choice,—and then the three men sallied forth into the nipping air of the Bahnhofstrasse.

"Where are you going?" asked Saunders of the Grimlander.

"Back to barracks," replied the Captain. "Will you accompany me?"

Saunders consulted his watch.

"Trafford and I are dining in an hour's time," he said, "but we will walk part of the way with you. I wish to show my friend a bit of the town."

Turning to the left, they entered one of the numerous lanes which proclaim the city's antiquity with gabled front and mullioned window. Ill-lit, ill-paved under the trampled snow, and smelling noticeably of garlic, bouillon, and worse, the thoroughfare—the Schugasse—led to the spacious Soldatenplatz, wherein was situated the fine barracks of the King's Guides. They had been walking but a few minutes, when a tall figure, heavily muffled in a black coat, strode rapidly past them. Trafford had a brief vision of piercing eyes shifting furtively under a woollen cap, as the man cast a lightning glance behind him. Then as the figure vanished abruptly into a mean doorway, Saunders and Von Hügelweiler exchanged glances.

"So he *is* back," said the former. "Then there is certain to be trouble."

"Nothing is more certain," said the Captain calmly.

"Who is back?" demanded the puzzled Trafford.

"Father Bernhardt," replied his friend.

And the American heaved a sigh of thankfulness.

CHAPTER THREE

A PROPOSITION

WHEN the two friends left him, Captain von Hügelweiler fell into something of a reverie. He had told Frau Krabb that he desired to win the King's Cup more than anything on earth. That was not, strictly speaking, the case, for there was one thing that he desired even more than the coveted trophy of the skating rink. Yet that thing was so remote from reach that it was more of a regret now than a desire. Years ago,—when he was a sub-lieutenant stationed at Weissheim,—he had fallen desperately in love with the youthful Princess Gloria von Schattenberg. Her high spirits and ever-ready laughter had captivated his poetic but somewhat gloomy temperament, and he had paid her a devotion which had been by no means unreciprocated by the romantic young Princess. And the courtship was not so impossible as might appear, for Ulrich von Hügelweiler belonged to the old aristocracy of Grimland, and his father owned an ancient Schloss of considerable pretensions, and a goodly slice of valley, vineyards, and pine forests fifty miles northwest of Weidenbruck. But the Princess's father,—the Grand Duke Fritz,—was an ambitious man, already seeing himself on the throne of Grimland, and poor Hügelweiler had been sent about his business with great celerity and little tact. To the young officer the blow had been a crushing one, for his whole heart had been given, his

whole soul pledged, to the vivacious Princess, and,—though years had rolled by,—time had done little to soften the bitterness of his deprivation. To his credit, be it said, that he had never sought consolation elsewhere; to his discredit, that he regarded his misfortune as a personal slight on the part of a malicious and ill-natured fate. For his was a self-centred nature that brooded over trouble, never suffering a bruise to fade or a healthy scar to form over an old wound. Even now his excitement at the glorious prospect of winning success and fame on the skating rink was marred and clouded by the hideous possibility of defeat. He desired,—with the intense desire of an egotistical mind,—to win the Cup, but he feared to lose almost more than he hoped to win.

On arriving at his modest quarters in the huge building in the Soldatenplatz, the Captain was surprised at seeing a visitor seated and awaiting his arrival. A man of medium height was reclining comfortably in his big armchair; his legs, high-booted and spurred, were thrust out in negligent repose, an eye-glass was firmly fixed in his right eye, a half-consumed cigarette smouldered beneath his coldly smiling lips. Von Hügelweiler drew himself up to the salute. His visitor was no less a personage than the Commander-in-Chief of the Army of Grimland, General Meyer, the most intimate friend of his Majesty King Karl.

“Your cigarettes are excellent, Captain,” began the General.

Von Hügelweiler regarded the cynical Jewish face in silence. General Meyer was a man whom few under-

stood and many feared. The greatcoat,—thrown open at the breast,—half revealed a number of famous Orders, none of them won by prowess on the field of battle. The spurred boots and the riding whip that occasionally flicked them suggested the horseman, though all knew that General Meyer was never so ill at ease as when on horseback. The dreamy eye, the slothful pose, the drawled speech, suggested anything but the ruler of a fiery soldiery, but for all that Meyer had won his way and held his post by something more formidable than a courtly tongue and a capacity for epigrammatic badinage. Those who served Meyer well were served well in return; those who flouted the Jew,—even in secret,—had a curious habit of being superannuated at an early period in their career.

“Pray be seated, Captain,” pursued the visitor suavely.

Von Hügelweiler drew up a chair, and sat stiffly thereon, awaiting developments.

“You are competing for the King’s prize on the Rundsee to-morrow?”

“Yes, General.”

“Ah! I happen to be judge of the competition.”

To this the Captain offered no comment. He was wondering what on earth was coming.

“You are exceedingly keen, of course, on winning this very important trophy?” pursued the elder man, with a swift glance.

“Yes, General—exceedingly keen,” admitted Von Hügelweiler.

“As a lad,” went on the Commander-in-Chief

dreamily, "I once entered an examination for horsemanship at the military school at Gleis. My uncle knew the officer who was examining the candidates, and thoughtfully sent him a dozen of champagne and a box of cigars on the eve of the examination. The champagne was,—if I mistake not,—Perrier Jouet of a vintage year, and the cigars the finest that are grown in the island of Cuba. I was not a particularly good horseman in those days, but I passed the examination—with honours."

The Captain received the information in stolid silence. The history of the remote and somewhat disgraceful episode did not particularly interest him. The General deposited his finished cigarette in a porcelain tray, and extracted a fresh one from a tin box on the table.

"Your cigarettes are really excellent, Captain," he mused. "Pray keep me company."

Von Hügelweiler acceded to the invitation.

"You draw, I presume, certain inferences from the incident I have just mentioned?" the Commander-in-Chief went on.

"No, General."

"None whatever?"

Von Hügelweiler smiled.

"None," he said, "unless you suggest that I should be wise to send you a dozen of champagne and a box of cigars."

The General vouchsafed no answering smile to his subordinate's facetious suggestion. He merely shook his head in pensive silence.

"I am a rich man," he said insinuatingly, "and my cellars are the best stocked in Weidenbruck—not excepting his Majesty's. You cannot help me that way."

Again there was silence, and slowly it was borne in on Von Hügelweiler that he was being tempted. The situation horrified him. However much he desired to win the King's Cup, he desired to win it fairly. On the other hand, he neither wished to offend his Commander-in-Chief nor ruin his prospects of success in the competition. He began to be angry with Fate for placing him in a dilemma, before he knew exactly what the dilemma was.

Suddenly the Commander-in-Chief sat bolt upright, and in a voice of great earnestness demanded:

"Von Hügelweiler, do you know that there is a firebrand in Weidenbruck?"

"Weidenbruck is a cold place, General, but it usually contains a firebrand or two."

"I know; but I speak of no common incendiary. Father Bernhardt is here."

Von Hügelweiler nodded.

"At number 42, Schugasse," he supplemented.

"You know that?" demanded the General eagerly.

"He passed me a quarter of an hour since. He was being followed, I think."

"Good!" ejaculated General Meyer. "I want him. Captain, I asked you just now if you wanted to win the King's prize. I learn that you are the most promising competitor for this important affair. The winner of the King's prize is sure of the personal interest of his Majesty. Grimland,—especially female Grimland,

—loves the successful athlete. Official Grimland smiles on him. Skating may not be the most useful accomplishment for a soldier, but proficiency in sport connotes, at any rate, physical fitness and a temperate life. There is no reason why you should not gain this trophy, and there is no reason why the gainer should not go far."

Von Hügelweiler's dark eyes flamed at the words, and his handsome, sombre face glowed involuntarily at the other's suggestion.

"As I am to be the judge," continued the General calmly, "there is no reason why your victory should not be a foregone conclusion."

Slowly the Captain's face hardened to a mask, and his eyes became points of steel.

"I do not follow, General," he said stiffly.

"You are a shade dense, my young friend," said Meyer, leaning forward and tapping the other's knee. "You want the King's prize; I want the King's enemy."

"But I cannot give him to you," protested the Captain.

"You know where he is housed; you have a sword."

"You wish me to effect his arrest, General? You have but to command."

"I do not desire his arrest in the least," said General Meyer, sighing wearily at the other's non-comprehension, and reclining again in the depths of his arm-chair. "If I wished his arrest I should go to Sergeant Kummer of our estimable police force. Father Bernhardt is a dangerous man, and a more dangerous

man arrested than at large. He has the fatal gift of touching the popular imagination. The ex-Queen is a woman of no strength, the exiled Princess Gloria is but a figure-head, a very charming figure-head it is true, but still only a figure-head. Father Bernhardt is a soldier, statesman, and priest in one inflammatory whole. He has a tongue of fire, a genius for organisation, the reckless devotion of an *âme damnée*. His existence is a menace to my royal master and the peace of Grimland. He had the misfortune to cause me a sleepless night last night. Captain von Hügelweiler, I must sleep sound to-night."

The Captain rose to his feet.

"If you give your orders, General, they shall be obeyed," he said, in a voice that bespoke suppressed emotion.

The General yawned slightly, and then contemplated his companion with an ingratiating smile.

"My dear young man," he remarked blandly, "for the moment I'm not a general, and I am giving no orders. I am the judge of the skating competition which is to be held to-morrow, and in order that I shall be able to do full justice to your merits it is necessary that I should sleep well to-night. Do I make my meaning clear?"

"Diabolically so," the words slipped out almost involuntarily.

"I beg your pardon," said the Commander-in-Chief stiffly.

But Von Hügelweiler's temper was roused. He had been prepared, if necessary, to compromise with his

conscience. He had argued,—with the easy morality of the egotist,—that he probably desired the King's prize more than any of his competitors, and probably deserved it more. Had Meyer demanded a little thing he might have granted it. But the thing asked was not little to a sensitive man with certain honourable instincts.

"I am a soldier, General," he declared, "and I am accustomed to accepting orders, not suggestions. If you order me to arrest this man I will take him dead or alive. If you suggest that I should murder him as a bribe to the judge of this skating competition, I refuse."

Von Hügelweiler's words rang high, and it was plain that his indignation was perilously near mastering his sense of discipline. But General Meyer's cynical smile never varied a hair's breadth, his pose never lost a particle of its recumbent indolence.

"Very well, Captain," he said at length. "Then I must take other means. Only do me the justice of confessing that I asked a favour when I might have commanded a service. Remember that all Grimlanders are not so dainty as yourself, and remember that murder is an ugly word and hardly applicable to the destruction of vermin. If this cursed priest is brought to trial there will be trouble in the city, street-fighting perhaps, in the narrow lanes round the cattle-market; any way, more bloodshed and misery than would be caused by an infantry sword through a renegade's breast-bone."

"But is an open trial a necessity?" demanded the

Captain, his anger vanishing in the chilling certainty that the King's prize would never be his.

But the Commander-in-Chief had had his say.

"Well," he said, rising to his feet, "if you will not do what is required, someone else must. No, don't salute me. I'm only an old Jew. Permit me to honour myself by shaking the hand of an honest man."

For a half-moment the generosity of the words rekindled the dying hopes in the Captain's breast. General Meyer was a strange man—was it possible that he respected scruples he did not himself possess? But as Von Hügelweiler gazed into the old Jew's face, and scanned the mocking light in the cold eyes, the cynical smile about the mobile lips, his rising hopes were succeeded by a deeper, deadlier chill. With a slight shrug of the shoulders and a smooth-spoken "Good-night, Captain," the Commander-in-Chief left the room.

Von Hügelweiler stood gazing at the closed door in silence. Then his face grew dark, and he shook his fist after his departed visitor with a gesture of uncontrolled rage. His lips twitched, his features worked, and then covering his face dramatically with his hands, he sank into a chair. For a bitterness, totally disproportionate to his worst fears, had entered his childish heart.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE THIERGARTEN

THE competition for the King's Cup had no terror for Nervy Trafford, nor did the fact that he was lamentably short of practice affect his peace of mind. When a man has lost his heart's desire, has faced the barrel of his own revolver, the prospect of gyrating on skates before a critical audience becomes a matter of casual importance. When he left Harvard—to the vast regret of his fellow-undergraduates and the infinite relief of the much-enduring dean—he had not known in what direction to bend his superabundant energies. To one who had an innate craving for an electrically-charged atmosphere and the employment of explosives, and who was not of the dollar-hunting kind, office work was out of the question. So he had gone to Oxford. But sport there—the sport of the English shires—was too stereotyped and too little dangerous to appeal to his ardent spirit. Back again in the United States, he had commenced a military career, but it is a platitude that a soldier must learn to obey before he can command; and Trafford had stumbled badly on the lowest rung of the military ladder. After that he had wandered. He had seen men and cities, and had come to the conclusion that there was only one city, and in that city but one person. Whither that conclusion had led him we have already seen. Briefly, he was an unsettled and rather a dangerous person in such an inflammatory

country as he was now visiting. It is little wonder, therefore, that the competition on the Rundsee caused him little anxiety, either as a trial of nerves or as a matter of vital importance in his cosmic outlook.

The Rundsee, where the contest was to take place, was an artificial piece of water, circular of shape, situated in the Thiergarten, the public park on the outskirts of Weidenbruck. At half-past two in the afternoon its frozen surface was crowded with a vast number of human beings, who had come to see the great annual competition for the King's prize. On one side a big pavilion, garnished with small flags and red cloth, had been erected for the benefit of the King and the favoured few. The majority of the throng were crowded behind ropes, leaving a sufficient area for the evolutions of the competitors. There was no question of the ice bearing so great a crowd, for the ice of the Rundsee was as hard as a London pavement, and many times as thick. A battery of elephant guns would have traversed it without inflicting a crack on its adamantine surface.

The scene was a gay one, for the winter sun had sucked up the morning mist and turned the dull grey sky to turquoise, and the snowy covering of the great trees into a bejewelled mantle of sparkling purity. A feeling of pent expectancy held the well-wrapped throng, a feeling which found outlet in rousing cheers when, with a cracking of whips and jingling of bells, a sleigh and four horses came rapidly down a broad avenue and halted at the back of the wooden pavilion.

It was the King—King Karl XXII., fat, smiling,

smoking, wrapped luxuriously in magnificent furs, and accompanied by his favourites, General Meyer and Robert Saunders.

The Grimlanders,—to do them justice,—never received their monarch without noise. They might hoot or they might cheer, they might throw garlands of flowers or nitro-glycerine bombs, but royalty is royalty, whether its representative be hero or villain, and it was never received in the silence of indifference. And at the present moment the throng was benevolent. The day was fine, the occasion interesting, and in the love of sport the Grimland public forgot its antipathy to permanent institutions.

“By the way,” asked the King of General Meyer, when they had found their way to the royal enclosure overlooking the Rundsee, “did you secure our friend Bernhardt last night?”

General Meyer shook his head.

“We had a failure,” he replied, “another failure.”

The King received the news without any outward sign of displeasure. Only one who knew him well would have read the deep disappointment of his placid silence.

“I thought you had discovered where he lodged,” he said at length.

“I had discovered the fox’s earth,” said Meyer, “but my hounds had not strong enough teeth to inconvenience him. I approached a certain Captain of the Guides, a young man of good family and approved courage. I offered substantial rewards, but the work was too dirty for his aristocratic fingers.”

"Perhaps it would have been wiser to have approached someone of humbler birth," said the King drily.

"I was forced to that conclusion myself," sneered the General, "and I requisitioned the services of two of the biggest scoundrels who enjoy the privilege of being your Majesty's subjects. Their consciences were un-tender, but they failed, as *canaille* will, when they come to hand-grips with a brave man."

"In other words," said the King, "two armed ruffians are incapable of tackling one priest. Next time I should try four."

"That is what I propose doing to-night, sire," said the General impassively.

The King turned to Saunders, who was seated on his left.

"What does the Englishman advise?" he asked.

"A company of Guards and a squadron of Dragoons," said Saunders curtly.

"An open arrest?" demanded his Majesty.

"Yes, and an open trial," affirmed Saunders. "After all, simplicity has its charms, and Father Bernhardt's popularity is so great that it can hardly be enhanced by a visit to the picturesque prison in the Cathedral Square."

"The Strafeburg!" said Meyer, naming the prison in question. "I fear the good citizens might essay a rescue."

"They certainly would," conceded Saunders, "but the Strafeburg was not erected by a speculative builder. It is made of stone, not papier-maché, and the gentle-

men who keep guard over it are not armed with pea-shooters."

The General nodded sagely.

"You mean you would risk bringing things to a head?" he said.

"That is my advice," said Saunders. "I have only been in Weidenbruck twenty-four hours, but have been here long enough to see the need of strong measures."

"You are right," said the King with some bitterness; "the woman who was once my wife and who hates me more than anything on earth, is seen at large unmolested in my capital. The Princess Gloria,—a charming young lady, who would like to see me guillotined in order that she may sit more comfortably in my seat,—is waiting her opportunity to cross the frontier and take up her quarters here, if she has not done so already. The music-halls resound with incendiary ditties! There is one in particular, the Roth-lied,—a catchy melody with a most inspiriting refrain,—which frankly and courageously advocates my removal to a better world. I am a patient man, God knows, and I desire peace at almost any price; but there are limits to my forbearance. Yet, when I put in a plea for action, I am told that a rash step would precipitate a revolution. I am beginning to think that my friend Saunders here is my best counsellor, and that simplicity is the best policy."

A roar of cheering from the crowd betokened the presence of the competitors on the ice. General Meyer rose from his seat.

"The best policy is generally simple," he said, "and

so is the worst. But with your Majesty's permission I will withdraw. My services are required below."

Hardly had Meyer left when Mrs. Saunders was ushered into the royal enclosure. She was a tall, fair woman with a cold, correct profile and unemotional grey eyes. Her manner was usually reserved, and her speech mocking. She possessed, however, a keen, if caustic, sense of humour, and those few people who were privileged to know her well were wisely proud of the privilege. The King rose from his chair, his gaze resting admirably on the tall, athletic figure in its neat Chinchilla coat and smart fur toque.

"Enter the Ice Queen!" said his Majesty, offering her the chair vacated by the Commander-in-Chief.

"Has the skating begun?" the lady thus addressed inquired animatedly.

"Not yet," her husband answered, "the competitors are having a little preliminary exercise while Meyer is putting on his skates. But you come at an opportune moment, my dear. We were indulging in a political discussion. I was advocating bold measures; Meyer, masterly inactivity. I desire your support for my arguments."

"Meyer says we can't trust the army," put in the King.

"Of course you can't trust the army," said Mrs. Saunders; "for it is not commanded by a soldier. General Meyer is an excellent judge of skating and champagne, but he is more of a policeman than a warrior. I should send him on a diplomatic mission to a remote country."

"And whom would you make Commander-in-Chief in his place?" asked the King smiling.

"One of the competitors to-day."

"What!" exclaimed the King, mystified. "Who?"

"Why, my husband's friend—George Trafford, the American!"

The King roared with laughter.

"Why not appoint your husband to the post?" he demanded.

"Because my husband has a young and beautiful wife," retorted Mrs. Saunders smilingly.

"Whereas this Mr. Trafford—?"

"Is a broken-hearted bachelor. He is prepared to seek the bubble reputation even at the cannon's mouth. He has more imagination than Robert. Besides, I don't mind so much his being killed."

Saunders laughed loudly, while the King's sunburned face beamed with genuine amusement.

"I have to thank Mrs. Saunders for a cheerful moment," he said, "a rare thing these troubrous times. I'm forty-five years of age, my dear lady," he went on, "and I've been on the throne fifteen years. Sometimes I feel as if I had reigned as long as Rameses II., and sometimes I feel every bit as old and dried-up as that mummied old gentleman in the British Museum. At the same time, as you see, I have my cheerful moments, and in those cheerful moments I see Father Bernhardt in one cell of the Strafeburg and the ex-Queen in another—the latter in a particularly damp cell, by the way."

"And the Princess Gloria von Schattenberg?" asked Saunders.

"Is too young and pretty for a cell," replied the King with a smile. "She is popular and dangerous, but I have a soft corner in my heart for her. I must fight her, of course, if she persists, but I've certain sunny memories of a little girl at Weissheim, all fun and laughter and enthusiasm for winter games, and I find it hard to take her seriously or wish her harm. But for the others," he went on, hardening his voice, "I'd have no mercy. They are playing with fire, and they are old enough to know that fire burns. Arrest them openly, I say, try them openly, I say, and if the proletariat objects—shoot them openly."

"Hear, hear," said Mrs. Saunders impassively, putting up her glasses and studying the faces of the different competitors on the Rundsee.

"Meyer wants one more chance of nobbling Father Bernhardt," said Saunders in a low voice.

"He shall have it," said the King; "and I hope and pray he will succeed. That priest's the heart and soul of the whole trouble. Once he is safe under lock and key, where can the Princess Gloria find another with such cunning, such resource, such heedless daring, to fight her battles and build her up a throne? Hullo, more cheering! What's that for? Ah, one of the competitors doing a bit of fancy skating to keep himself warm. A fine skater, too, by St. Liedwi,* a powerful skater, but a shade reckless, eh?"

"That is our friend, George Trafford," said Saunders; "a fine skater, a powerful skater, but, as you say, distinctly reckless."

*The patron saint of skating.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE KING'S CUP

As the cheers which greeted the American's essay on the Rundsee died down, General Meyer, shod with a pair of high-laced boots fitted with fine steel blades, sallied forth to the ice, and shook each of the competitors in turn by the hand. Von Hügelweiler fancied he read malice in the Commander-in-Chief's eye, but his spirits had sunk too low to be further depressed by such omens of his imagination. He had determined to go through with the contest, trusting dimly that his merits might so far exceed those of his rivals that it would be morally impossible to withhold the prize from him. But he was anything but sanguine, for though he believed himself the best skater present, he felt sure that both his countrymen would run him close, and that Meyer would award the prize to anyone but himself, if he could reasonably do so.

The competition,—like most skating competitions,—was divided into two parts. In the first, the performers had to skate in turn a number of set figures; in the second they had to skate for a period of five minutes any figures of their own choosing. In one important respect the competition differed from others held on the Continent—it was not held under the auspices of the International Skating Union.

It is generally accepted that there are two styles of skating, the English style and the Continental, or, as

it is sometimes termed, the International style. The characteristics of the English school are an upright carriage, a straight knee, and a general restraint and rigidity of pose, discountenancing any unnecessary movement of the arms or the unemployed leg. The Continental style is skated with a slightly bent knee, with the unemployed leg trailing behind the body, and considerable gesticulation of the arms. The exponents of the latter claim a greater gracefulness of execution, a freer and more beneficial exercise of the muscles, and a wider scope of possible evolutions. The English stylists claim dignity, severity, and the capacity of doing difficult things without apparent effort. Both have their merits and their advocates,—but it is generally accepted that to skate at all one must employ one of these two distinct methods,—and practically all skating competitions are held under the auspices of one or the other school. In Grimland, however, under General Meyer's influence, a third school had arisen. In this an effort had been made to combine the speed and steadiness of the English skaters with the wonderful scope for brilliant and daring evolutions afforded by the Continental method. In Grimland competitions, therefore, marks were awarded for the scale on which figures were described, and the pace at which they were performed; while, at the same time, reward was offered for those exhilarating *tours de force* which are impossible of execution under English methods. To put it differently, no marks were awarded for style *qua* style, but for such things as accuracy, speed, boldness, and elegance, quite apart from the

mechanical methods by which such excellences were attained.

The first competitor to attempt the set figures was Herr Franz Schmolder,—a lithe little athlete, who skated with great power and elegance. On one or two occasions, however, he failed to hold his edge firmly after a difficult turn, and it was obvious to Von Hügelweiler that the strained knee which Frau Krabb had made mention of was bothering him more than a little.

Captain Einstein was the second of the four aspirants, and if,—as Frau Krabb had insinuated,—his big frame was filled with an undue proportion of alcoholic nourishment, it did not seem to have impaired his “back brackets” or spoiled his “rocking turns.”

“There’s a dash about that fellow that’s fine!” remarked Trafford to Von Hügelweiler, who was standing near him, wrapped during inaction in a big military ulster.

The Captain of the Guides had already in his own mind ruled Schmolder out of the competition, exaggerating his faults to himself with egotistical overkeenness. Einstein, however, was skating so brilliantly that Von Hügelweiler was beginning to experience the deepest anxiety lest he should prove the ultimate winner of the coveted trophy. The anxiety indeed was so deep that he refused to admit it even to himself.

“Wait till we come to the second part of the competition—the free-skating,” he retorted. “Free-skating requires great nerve, great endurance, and absolute fitness. It is there that Einstein will fail.”

When Einstein had finished his compulsory figures

amid a round of applause, Von Hügelweiler slipped off his long ulster. For a moment a bad attack of stage-fright assailed him,—for there is nothing quite so nerve-racking as a skating competition before a critical judge and an equally critical audience,—and his heart was turned to water and his knees trembled with a veritable ague; but a cheer of encouragement restored him to himself, and he struck out for glory. With head erect, expanded chest, arms gracefully disposed, and knee slightly bent, he was about as pretty an exponent of Continental skating as one could wish to see. He travelled rapidly and easily on a firm edge, his turns were crispness itself, the elegance of his methods was patent to the least initiated.

General Meyer following slowly with note-book in hand, smiled appreciatively, as he jotted down the marks gained from time to time by his brilliant "counters," "brackets," and "rocking turns." The crowd roared their applause, and in the music of their cheers, Von Hügelweiler's depression vanished, and his heart sang an answering pæan of jubilee. Like most nervous, self-centred men, he most excelled before an audience when once the initial fear had worn off. And now he was skating as he had never skated before, with a dash, energy, and precision that drew redoubled cheers from the spectators and audible applause from the royal box. Even Meyer, he reflected, with all his malice, could hardly dare to give another the prize now; to do so would be not merely to violate justice, but to insult the intelligence of every man and woman on the ice.

At the conclusion of his effort, Trafford congratulated the Captain warmly on his performance. Von Hügelweiler's dark eyes shone bright with pleasure. Already he saw himself crowned with the invisible laurels of undying fame, receiving the massive silver trophy from the royal hands.

"Thanks, my American friend," he said, heartily, "go on and prosper."

With a few bold strokes Trafford started on his attempt to do superbly what others had done faultlessly. His style instantly arrested attention. Here was no lithe figure full of lissom vitality and vibrant suppleness; no graceful athlete whose arms and legs seemed ever ready to adopt fresh and more elegant poses. But here was an exponent of the ultra-English school, a rigid, braced figure travelling over the ice like an automaton on skates, an upright, inflexible form, sailing along on a perfect edge at an amazing speed, with a look of easy contempt on his face alike for the difficulties of his art and the opinion of his watchers.

Ever and again there was an almost imperceptible flick of the ankle, a slight shifting of the angle of the shoulders, and some difficult turn had been performed, and he was travelling away in a slightly different direction at a slightly increased rate of speed. The crowd watched intently, but with little applause. They felt that it was wonderful, but they did not particularly admire.

To Von Hügelweiler,—trained as he was in the theory and practice of the "Continental" school,—the performance seemed stiff and ugly.

"Mein Gott," cried Einstein, "at what a speed he travels!"

"He wants a bigger rink than the Rundsee!" exclaimed Schmolder. "A man like that should have the Arctic Ocean swept for him."

Von Hügelweiler was less complimentary.

"I don't think we need fear the American, my friends," he said. "He skates his figures fast and big, but with the grace of a dummy. Such stiffness is an insult to the Rundsee, which is the home of elegant skating. See with what a frowning face General Meyer follows this American about!"

"If you can learn anything from Meyer's face," said Captain Einstein drily, "you should give up the army and go in for diplomacy."

"Wait till he comes to the free-skating!" went on Von Hügelweiler. "That needs a man with joints and ligaments—not a poker. Our friend will find himself placed last, I fear; and I am sorry, for he has come a long way for his skating, and he seems an excellent fellow. I will say a few words of encouragement to him."

But Trafford had just then momentarily retired from the rink. He was changing his skates for the pair he had bought at Frau Krabb's the previous evening.

At the free-skating, which followed, Franz Schmolder broke down altogether. His knee failed him when he had performed for three minutes instead of the necessary five. Einstein, who followed, did well up to a point. But five minutes' free-skating is a fairly severe test of condition, and the big, burly soldier did

not finish with quite the dash and energy he had begun with. Von Hügelweiler, however, gave another splendid display of effective elegance, and again drew resounding cheers for his vigorous and attractive performance. He himself made no doubt now that he was virtually the winner of the King's Cup. He had worked hard for his success, and was already beginning to feel the glow that comes from honourable effort generously rewarded. Meyer would doubtless be sorry to have to place him first, but in the face of Einstein's and Schmolder's comparative failure, and the American's stiffness, no other course would be open to him. Von Hügelweiler, however, watched Trafford's free-skating with interest, dreading, with an honest and generous dread, lest his amiable rival should disgrace himself. To his astonishment, Trafford was no longer a petrified piece of anatomy skating with frozen arms and arthritic legs. He beheld instead an exponent of the Continental school, who seemed to have in his repertoire a whole armoury of fanciful figures and astounding *tours de force*. Trafford was as free and unrestrained now as he had been severe and dignified before. Graceful, lissom, filled with an inexhaustible, superabundant energy, he performed prodigies of whirling intricacy, dainty pirouettings, sudden bold leaps, swift changes of edge, all with such masterful daring and complete success that the whole ring of spectators cheered itself hoarse with enthusiasm.

"Bravo! bravo!" cried Von Hügelweiler, clapping him heartily on the back at the conclusion of his effort. "It is good to see skating like that! If you had

skated the preliminary figures with the same zeal you have displayed just now, we Grimlanders would have to deplore the departure of a national trophy from our native land."

Trafford accepted the left-handed compliment in silence, lighting a cigarette while General Meyer totted up the amount of marks he had awarded to the several competitors. After a few minutes' calculation,—and after his figures had been checked by a secretary,—the General skated back to the front of the royal box and announced his decision to the King. Then, at a word from his Majesty, a gentleman in a blue and yellow uniform placed a gigantic megaphone to his lips, and turning it to the various sections of the crowd, announced:

"The King's Prize: the winner is Herr George Trafford; second, Captain Ulrich Salvator von Hügelweiler."

The American received the announcement with complete outward calmness. And yet those hoarsely spoken words had touched a chord in his heart that he had believed snapped and irrevocably broken. For a moment he lived, for a moment the cheers of his fellow men had galvanised into healthy activity the dead brain that had lost interest in all things under the sun. The success itself was a trivial affair, yet in a magic moment he had become reconciled to life and its burden, vaguely thankful that he had kept the first barrel of his revolver free from powder and ball.

"Congratulations, Herr Trafford," said General Meyer, who now approached him with proffered hand.

"Escort me, I beg, to his Majesty, who will present you with the cup. You will also receive a royal command to dine to-morrow night at the Palace."

"Congratulations, Herr Trafford," said another voice.

Trafford looked round and beheld the competitor who had been placed second. The tone of the felicitation was one of undisguised bitterness, the face of the speaker was the ashen face of a cruelly disappointed man. And Von Hügelweiler, honestly believing himself cheated of his due,—and not bearing to see another receive the prize which he felt should have been his,—slunk from the scene with hate and misery and all uncharitableness in his tortured soul. Then, as he took off his skates, the cheering broke out again, and told that the American was receiving the trophy from the King's hand. An ejaculation of bitterness and wrath burst from his lips.

Hardly had he breathed his angry word into the frosty air when a small hand plucked at his fur-lined coat, and looking round he perceived a charming little face gazing into his own.

"Why so cross, Captain?" asked the interrupter of his execration.

Captain von Hügelweiler's hand went up to the salute.

"Your Royal High—"

"Hush! you tactless man," said the Princess Gloria, for it was no other. "Do you want to have me arrested? For the sake of old times," she went on, putting her arm in his, "I claim your protection."

But Hügelweiler had not thought of delivering the exiled Princess to the authorities! For one thing, his mind was too occupied with self-pity to have room for State interests; secondly, he was still in love with the fascinating creature who looked up at him so appealingly, that he would sooner have killed himself than betrayed the appeal of those wondrous eyes.

They were strolling away from the Rundsee in the direction of the town, and a straggling multitude of the spectators was streaming behind them in the snowy Thiergarten.

Von Hügelweiler's lips trembled a little.

"It is good to see you again, Princess," he whispered. "It is comforting, just when I need comfort."

"Comfort!" echoed his companion with a grimace. "You were swearing, Ulrich! You are a good sportsman, you should take defeat with better grace."

"I can accept open defeat, Princess, like a man, though I had set my heart on the prize. But I was not fairly beaten. The American skated his figures as ungracefully as they could be skated."

"Why, he skated marvellously," declared the Princess enthusiastically. "I never saw such speed and daring on the ice. The man must have been born with skates on. I never saw a finer——"

"Nonsense!" broke in the irate Captain, forgetting both manners and affection in the extremity of his wrath. "He won because General Meyer had a grudge against me. He asked me last night to do a dirty piece of work. In the name of loyalty he wished me to murder a civilian; but I am a Von Hügelweiler, not an

assassin, and I refused, though I knew that by so doing I was ruining my chances of success to-day."

The Princess Gloria pressed his arm sympathetically.

"The King's service frequently involves dirty work," she said, looking at him out of the corner of her eyes.

"So it appears!"

"Why not embrace a service that calls for deeds of valour, and leads to high honour?"

Von Hügelweiler looked at the bright young face that now was gazing into his so hopefully. A thousand memories of a youthful ardour, born amidst the suns and snows of Weissheim, rushed into his kindling heart. He had lost the King's Cup; might he not wipe out the bitter memory of defeat by winning something of incomparably greater value? There was a price, of course; there always was, it seemed. Last night it was the honour of a clean man; to-day it was loyalty to his King. But how much greater the present bribe than that offered by the Commander-in-Chief! The intoxication of desire tempted him, tempted him all the more shrewdly because of his recent depression. What had he to do with a career that was tainted with such a head as the scheming Jew, Meyer? What loyalty did he owe to a man served by such officers and such method as was Karl? The Princess's eyes repeated their question, and their silent pleading shook him as no words could have done.

"What service?" he asked falteringly.

"My service," was the hushed retort.

"And the reward?" he demanded.

"Honour."

"And—love?"

There was silence momentary, but long enough for the forging of a lie.

"Perhaps," she breathed, looking down coquettishly. A great light shone in the Captain's eyes, and the sombre beauty of his face was illumined by a mighty joy.

"Princess Gloria," he cried, "I am yours to the death!"

CHAPTER SIXTH

“WEIN, WEIB, UND GESANG”

THAT evening Mr. and Mrs. Robert Saunders were George Trafford's guests in a private room of the Hôtel Concordia. In the centre of the dining table stood a big silver trophy of considerable value and questionable design. As soon as the soup had been served, Trafford solemnly poured out the contents of a champagne bottle into its capacious depths. He then handed it to Mrs. Saunders.

“Felicitations,” she said, taking the trophy in both hands. “I drink to St. Liedwi, the patron saint of skaters, coupled with the name of George Trafford, winner of the King's Cup.”

Saunders was the next to take the prize in his hands.

“I drink a health unto their Majesties, King Edward of England and King Karl of Grimland, and to the President of the United States,” he said; and then bowing to his host, “Also to another good sportsman, one Nervy Trafford. God bless 'em all!”

Trafford received the cup from Saunders, his lips muttered something inaudible, and tossing back his head he drank deep.

“What was your toast, Mr. Trafford?” demanded Mrs. Saunders quietly.

The winner of the cup shook his head sagely.

“That is a secret,” he replied.

“A secret! But I insist upon knowing,” returned the lady. “Tell me, what was your toast?”

Trafford hesitated a moment.

“I toasted ‘*Wein, Weib, und Gesang*,’” he announced at length.

“Wine, woman, and song!” repeated Mrs. Saunders. “A mere abstract toast, which you would have confessed to at once. Please particularise?”

“The ‘wine,’” said Trafford, “is the wine of champagne, which we drink to-night, ’89 Cliquot. ‘Woman,’ is Eve in all her aspects and in all countries—Venus victrix, sea-born Aphrodite, Astarte of the Assyrians, Kali of the Hindoos. God bless her! God bless all whom she loves and all who love her!”

“And the song?” demanded Saunders.

“The song is the one I have heard one hundred and fifty times since I have been here,” replied Trafford. “Its title is unknown to me, but the waiters hum it in the passages, the cabmen chant it from their box seats, the street-boys whistle it with variations in the Bahnhofstrasse.”

“That sounds like the Rothlied,” said Saunders. “It is a revolutionary air.”

“I like it enormously,” said Trafford.

“Of course *you* would,” said Saunders. “You have the true Grimlander’s love of anarchy. But if you wish, we will subsequently adjourn to the Eden Theatre of Varieties in the Karlstrasse. I am told that the Rothlied is being sung there by a beautiful damsel of the aristocratic name of Schmitt.”

“I have seen her posters,” said Trafford, “and I

should like, I confess, to see the original. But what of Mrs. Saunders? Is the 'Eden' a respectable place of entertainment?"

"It is an Eden of more Adams than Eves," said Mrs. Saunders. "No, I do not propose to follow you into its smoky, beer-laden atmosphere. I am going to accompany Frau generalin von Bilderbaum to the opera to hear 'La Bohème.' But before I leave I want further enlightenment on the subject of your toast. 'Wein' is all right, and 'Gesang' is all right, but what about 'Weib'? I thought you had sworn off the sex."

"Sworn off the sex!—Never! True, I offered to one individual my heart, and hand, and soul; but the individual deemed the offering unsatisfactory. I now offer to the whole female race what I once offered to one member of it."

"Polygamist!" laughed Saunders.

"No," explained Trafford, "it's a case of first come, first served."

"You are offering your heart and hand and soul to the first eligible maiden who crosses your path?" asked Mrs. Saunders, with upraised brows.

"My heart and hand," corrected Trafford with great dignity.

"Come, come," Saunders broke forth, "it's time we were off!"

(5) (6) (7) (8) (9)

The auditorium of the Eden Theatre was a long oblong chamber, with a crude scheme of decoration, and no scheme of ventilation worth speaking about.

It possessed, however, a good orchestra, an excellent brew of lager beer, and usually presented a tolerably attractive show to the public of Weidenbruck. For the sum of four kronen per head Saunders and Trafford obtained the best seats in the building. For the expenditure of a further trivial sum they obtained long tumblers of the world-famed *tigerbräu*.

“A promising show this,” said Trafford, lighting a large cigar. An exceedingly plump lady in magenta tights, was warbling a patriotic ditty to the tune of “Won’t you come home, Bill Bailey?”

“More quantity than quality,” commented Saunders cynically. “Personally,—not being possessed of your all-embracing enthusiasm for womanhood at large,—I find myself looking forward to the next item on the programme.”

“What’s that? The ‘Rothlied’?”

“No, Midgets.”

Trafford uttered an exclamation of disgust.

“Little things amuse little minds,” he said rudely. “Give me a strong man or a giant, and I will watch with interest.”

At this point the curtain descended on the plump warbler, and a powdered attendant in plush knicker-bockers removed the number 7 from the wings, and substituted the number 9.

“Oh, it isn’t the midgets yet, after all,” said Saunders, consulting his programme. “It’s the *Schöne Fräulein Schmitt*—the beautiful Miss Smith. I wonder if she’s as lovely as her posters.”

As the curtain drew up again, a young girl tripped

lightly on to the middle of the stage, and it was at once manifest that the epithet "*schöne*" was no mere advertising euphemism.

Her black skirt was short, her black bodice low, and her black picture hat exceedingly large, but her limbs were shapely, her eyes marvellously bright though small, and there was a vivacity and grace in her movements that put her predecessor to shame. When she sang, her voice proved to be a singularly pure soprano, and,—what was more remarkable,—gave evidence of considerable taste and sound training. The song was a dainty one, all about a young lady called Nanette, who conquered all hearts till she met someone who conquered hers. And then, of course, Nanette lost her art, as well as her heart, and could make no impression on the only man who had really touched the deeps of her poor little soul. The last verse, naturally, was a tragedy,—the usual tragedy of the smiling face and the aching bosom. The idea was not exactly a novel one, but the air was pretty, and the singer's personality won a big success from the commonplace theme. Anyway, the audience rose to her, and there was much clapping of hands, clinking of beer glasses, and guttural exclamations of enthusiasm.

"Bravo!" cried Trafford ecstatically, "Bravo! Bravissimo! Behold an artist among artistes, a fairy of the footlights! Bravo! Well done, beautiful Miss Schmitt!"

"Charming," agreed Saunders more calmly, "and, strangely enough, extraordinarily like a young lady I met a few years ago."

"Perhaps it is the young lady," suggested Trafford. "I noticed she fixed her beady black eyes on you during the last verse."

"I think not," said Saunders drily. "The young lady I was referring to was a somewhat more exalted personage than Fräulein Schmitt."

The fascinating songstress re-appeared for her encore, and this time the orchestra struck up a martial air with a good deal of rolling drums in it.

"My 'Gesang,'" whispered Trafford excitedly.

"The 'Rothlied,'" said Saunders.

Again the Fräulein sang, and now the burthen of her song was of battlefields and war's alarms. The tune was vastly inspiriting, and the audience knew it well, taking up the chorus with infectious enthusiasm.

"It's great!" muttered Trafford, twirling excitedly at his moustaches. "By the living Jingo, it's great!"

And of a truth the air was an intoxicating one. There was gunpowder in it, musketry and cold steel, reckless charges and stern movements of advance. One caught the thunder of hoofs and the blare of bugles. Its infection became imperious, maddening even,—for the audience forgot their pipes and their *tigerbräu*, and beat time to the insistent rhythm, till the chorus gave them a chance of imparting their enthusiasm to the roaring refrain. The girl herself seemed the embodiment of martial ardour. She trod the stage like a little war-horse, her eye sought the gallery and struck fire from the beer-loving *bourgeoisie*. For a second her gaze seemed to fall upon Saunders mockingly, and with an air of challenge. Then she glanced round

the crowded house, held it spellbound, lifted it up, carried it to high regions of carnage, self-sacrifice, and glory. The audience roared, clapped, screamed with exuberant acclaim. Their state was *frénétique*—no other word, French, English, or German, well describes it.

“By George, she’s a witch!” said Trafford. “She’s as dangerous as a time fuse. I’ll be hanged if I don’t want to fight someone!”

The encore verse was more pointed, more sinister, less general in its application. It spoke of wrongs to be righted, tyranny to be overcome, freedom to be gained. It hinted of an uplifting of the proletariat, of armed citizens and frenzied women, of tumult in square and street; it breathed of barricades and civic strife, the vast upheaval of a discontented people determined to assert their rights. Men looked at each other and stirred uneasily in their seats, and then glanced round in apprehension,—as if expecting the entrance of the police. The song was a veritable “*Marseillaise*,” a trumpet call to revolution, a match in a barrel of gunpowder; and with the final chorus and the stirring swing of the refrain, all remnants of prudence and restraint were cast to the winds. The house rose *en masse*; men mounted their seats and waved sticks and umbrellas aloft; a party of young officers drew their swords and brandished them with wild insurgent cries. Forbidden names were spoken, cheers were raised for popular outlaws and suspects, groans for unpopular bureaucrats and the King’s favourites. It was an intoxicating moment,—whatever one’s sympathies

might be,—and it was obvious enough that the temper of the people was frankly revolutionary, and that the authorities would be quite justified,—from their point of view,—in arresting the audience and the management *en bloc*.

"We'd better clear out," suggested Saunders; "there's going to be trouble."

"If there's a row," announced Trafford grimly, "I'm going to be in it. You've seen stirring times over here before, but I'm a novice at it, and I want bleeding. Shall we raise three cheers for Karl and fight our way out?"

"Not if you want to keep your thick skull weather-proof," was the sensible retort. "There's always discontent in Grimland, but there's a big sea running just now, and it isn't wise to fight the elements. Sit tight, my friend, and you'll live to see more exciting things than a noisy night at the Eden Music-Hall."

The curtain was down again now, but the audience still roared for the re-appearance of their favourite, still clamoured for another verse of the intoxicating song.

"Hullo! what's this?" cried Trafford. An attendant had edged her way up to Saunders, and was offering him a folded note on a tray. "*If you have any pleasant memories of the winter of 1904, come round to the stage door and ask for Fräulein Schmitt.*" That was the purport of the note, and after reading it, Saunders handed it to Trafford.

"Then it must be your lady friend, after all," maintained the latter, smiling at his friend.

"It must indeed," acquiesced Saunders with a frown.
"Come round with me now."

"Why not go by yourself?"

"Because I am a married man," replied Saunders,
"and I want a chaperon." And together the two
men left the still noisy house and made their way to
the stage door.

Under the guidance of a pale youth in a shabby
pony coat, they entered a gloomy passage, ascended a
steep flight of stone steps, and halted before a door,
which had once been painted green.

The pale one knocked, and a clear musical voice
gave the necessary permission to enter.

A naturally bare and ugly room had been rendered
attractive by a big stove, several comfortable chairs,
and an abundance of photographs, unframed sketches
and artistic knick-knacks. It had been rendered still
more attractive by the presence of a charming young
lady, who was engaged—with the assistance of her
dresser—in removing all traces of "make-up" from
her comely lips and cheeks.

The lady in question came forward with an air of
pleasurable excitement, and smiling a warm welcome to
the Englishman, cried:

"So you *have* come, Herr Saunders! You have
not, then, altogether forgotten the winter of 1904?"

Saunders took the small hand which had been ex-
tended to him and bowed low over it.

"Heaven forbid, my dear Princess—or must I call
you Fräulein Schmitt, now? No, indeed, so long as I
have memory cells and the power to consult them, I

shall never forget the winter of 1904. It gave me an angel for a wife, a king for a friend, and—must I say it—a princess for an enemy. That fierce enmity! It is by no means my least pleasurable remembrance. There was so much fun in it, such irresponsible laughter, that it all seems now more like the struggle of children for a toy castle than anything else."

"Ah, but you forget that I lost a dear father and a loved brother in the struggle for that toy castle!" There was almost a life-time of sorrow in the young girl's voice.

Again Saunders bent his head.

"Pardon me, Princess," he said, "I did not forget that, nor the fact that you nearly lost your life, and I mine. But my memory loves rather to linger on the bob-sleighing excursions, the tea-fights at Frau Mengler's, the frivolous disputations and serious frivolities—all with such a delicious substratum of intrigue."

"You have a convenient memory, mine Herr," she said quietly. "You remember the bright things, you half remember the grey, the black you entirely forget."

Saunders' smile faded, for there was still a touch of sadness in the girl's words. Under the circumstances it was not unnatural, but he thought it more considerate to keep the interview from developing on serious lines.

"The art of living is to choose one's memories," he said lightly. "He who has conquered his thoughts, has conquered a more wonderful country than Grimland."

"And so marriage has made of you a philosopher,

Herr Saunders?" she returned, her soft lips curling a trifle contemptuously. "Well, perhaps you are right—if we take life as a jest, death, then, is only the peal of laughter that follows the jest." And then, turning to the American, she chided Saunders with: "But you have not presented your friend!"

"I must again crave pardon—I had quite forgotten him," apologised Saunders. "Your Highness, may I present my very good friend, Mr. George Trafford of New York—the winner of the King's Cup."

The American bowed low before this exquisite creature; then uplifting his head and shoulders and twirling his moustache—a habit he had when his emotions were at all stirred—he asked with true American directness:

"Am I speaking to a princess of the blood royal or to a princess of song?"

The princess and the Englishman quickly exchanged amused glances, and a moment later there came from the girl a ringing laugh, a delightful laugh bubbling over with humour, with not a hint of the sorrow or the bitterness of a few moments before, while Saunders hastened to say:

"Both, my American friend! You are addressing the high-born Princess Gloria von Schattenberg, cousin to his Majesty King Karl of Grimland!"

"Then I congratulate the high-born princess less on her high birth than on her inimitable gift of song," said the American gallantly.

The Princess acknowledged the felicitation with a bewitching smile.

“Thank you, Herr Trafford,” she said simply. “It is better to be a music-hall star in the ascendant than a princess in exile—it is far more profitable, isn’t it?” No answer was expected, and in a trice her mood changed again. “When I fled the country three years ago, Herr Trafford,” she continued, “I was penniless—my father dead, and his estates confiscated. True, an allowance—a mere pittance—might have been mine had I returned and bowed the knee to Karl.” She stopped, her feelings seemingly too much for her; in a moment, however, she had mastered them. “But I was a Schattenberg!” she cried, with a little toss of her head. “And the Schattenbergs—as Herr Saunders will testify—are a stiff-necked race. There was nothing to be done,” she went on, “but develop the gifts God had given me. Under an humble nom de guerre I have achieved notoriety and a large salary. Germany, France, Belgium, I have toured them all—and my incognito has never been pierced. So when I got hold of a splendid song I lost no time in hastening to Weidenbruck, for I knew it would go like wildfire here.”

“A most dangerous step.” The comment came from the American, but there was a light of frank admiration in his eye.

“Oh, no!” she protested, a faint touch of colour in her cheek, denoting that his approving glance had not escaped her. “It is years since I was in this place.” And smiling at the Englishman, now, she added naïvely: “My features are little likely to be recognised.”

"Indeed!" voiced Saunders, a touch of satire in his tone. "Photographs of the exiled Princess Gloria are in all the shop-windows, her personality is more than a tolerably popular one. When they are placed in conjunction with those of the equally popular Fräulein Schmitt, will not people talk?"

"I hope they will do more than that," confessed the Princess, growing excited.

"You want——?"

"I want Grimland," interrupted the Princess; and added loftily: "nothing more and nothing less. You will have me arrested?"

"Not yet!" declared Saunders with his brightest smile. "The night is cold—your dressing-room is cosy. No, my fascinating, and revolutionary young lady, the truce between us has been so long unbroken that I cannot rush into hostilities in this way. Besides, we are not now in 1904, and——"

"Oh, for 1904!" cried the Princess, her eyes ablaze with the light of enthusiasm. "Oh, for the sweets of popularity, the ecstasy of rousing brave men and turning their blood to wine and their brains to fire! I want to live, to rule, to be obeyed and loved as a queen!"

In an instant Trafford felt a responsive glow; he started to speak but Saunders already was speaking.

"Princess," the Englishman was saying coldly, "popularity is champagne with a dash of brandy in it. It is a splendid pick-me-up. It dispels ennui, migraine, and all the other troubles of a highly-strung, nervous system. Only, it is not what medical folk call

a 'food.' It does not do for breakfast, luncheon and dinner. After a time it sickens."

"Popularity—the adulation of my people would never pall on me," returned the Princess, gazing off for the moment, absorbed in a realm of dreams.

"No, but the police might take a hand," intimated Saunders grimly. "There is a castle at Weidenbruck called the Strafeburg. As its name implies, it is intended otherwise than as a pleasure residence. It is a picturesque old pile, but, curiously enough, the architect seems to have neglected the important requirements of light and air. You would get very tired of the Strafeburg, my Princess!"

"The people of Paris got very tired of the Bastile," retorted the Princess hotly and flashing a defiant look at the Englishman. Trafford's hand clinched in sympathy for her. Never was maid so splendidly daring and reckless and fascinating! "They got very tired of Louis XVI.," the voice was still going on, "and the people of Weidenbruck are very tired of the Strafeburg."

To Trafford's astonishment the Princess's eyes showed danger of filling upon uttering these last words. Her perfect mouth quivered, and of a sudden, she seemed to him younger—certainly not more than nineteen. Again he was tempted to interfere in her behalf, but again Saunders was before him.

"They got tired of a good many people in Paris," the Englishman said slowly. "Ultimately, even of M^{ere} Guillotine. But supposing this country rose, pulled down the Strafeburg and other interesting relics,

and decapitated my excellent friend, the King; supposing after much cutting of throats, burning of buildings, and shootings against the wall, a certain young lady became Gloria the First of Grimland, do you imagine she would be happy? No—in twelve months she would be bored to death with court etiquette, with conflicting advice, and the servile flattery of interested intriguers. Believe me, she is far happier enchanting the audiences of Belgium and Germany than she would be in velvet and ermine and a gold crown that fell off every time she indulged in one of her irresponsible fits of merriment."

"I might forget to laugh," said the Princess sadly. "But no, I cannot, will not, take your advice! Do you not suppose that nature intended me to fill a loftier position than even the high firmament of the *Café Chantant*? No, a thousand times no, Herr Saunders—I am a Schattenberg and I mean to fight!"

The American could not restrain himself an instant longer,

"Bravo!" burst out Trafford enthusiastically. "There's a ring in that statement that warms my heart tremendously!"

A swift frown clouded Saunders' brow. It was plain to see that the Englishman was much annoyed at the American's outspoken approval of the Princess's purpose; but she broke into the laughter of a mischief-loving child.

"And you—are not you a friend of King Karl?" she inquired of Trafford, while a new light shone in her eyes.



**"The lady wants to be seen home—and I'm going
to do it if I swing for it!"**

The American gave a furious twist to his moustache before answering.

"Mrs. Saunders, I believe, has recommended me as his Commander-in-Chief," he said with mock gravity, "but the appointment has not yet been confirmed. 'Till then my services are at the disposal of the highest bidder."

"My American friend's services are of problematic value," put in Saunders, recovering his temper. "He is an excellent skater, but a questionable general. He has had an exciting day and a superb dinner. With your permission I will take him back to his bed at the Hôtel Concordia."

The Princess had not taken her eyes off of the American since he had last spoken.

"He has energy," she mused, looking into space now, "also the capacity for inspiring enthusiasm, and I am not at all sure that he has not the instinct of a born tactician."

"But I am," Saunders broke in bluntly. "Princess, we have the honour of wishing you good-night!"

The Princess laid a delicate hand on the Englishman's arm.

"Herr Saunders," she said, "I will ask you to see me home."

Saunders shook his head.

"You must excuse me," he said. "To-night, I am neutral, but neutral only. I am the King's guest and must not aid the King's enemies."

"Good loyal man!" exclaimed the Princess. "*Plus royalist que le roi!*" And then turning to the Ameri-

can: "And Herr Trafford? He will not refuse to perform a small act of courtesy?"

"Trafford accompanies me!" declared Saunders firmly.

"I'm hanged if he does!" spoke up Trafford. "The lady wants to be seen home—and I'm going to do it if I swing for it!"

The Princess transferred her hand to Trafford's arm.

"Thank you," she said with a bewilderingly grateful look up into his face.

"Nervy, you're a fool—a bigger fool than ever I believed you to be!" exploded Saunders.

Trafford's only answer was a most complacent grin.

"Good-night, Herr Saunders!" said the Princess in the sweetest of accents. "Remember me kindly to your wife and other Royalists. We may meet again or not—my impression is that we shall. . . . If so, remember that laughter is not always a symptom of child's play."

"Good-night, Princess!" returned Saunders with an exaggerated low bow. "Forgive me, won't you, if I take the threatened revolution lightly? The possibility of your sitting on the throne of Grimland," he went on with another obeisance, "opens up such delightful prospect that I shall fight against it with only half a heart. Still, I shall fight against it. Good-night, Prin—Your Majesty!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONFIDENCES IN A WINE SHOP

NERVY TRAFFORD—comfortably covered by a warm rug, seated in an open sleigh next to a young lady of exalted birth, romantic temperament, and unimpeachable comeliness—was almost a happy man. It was not that he had fallen in love at first sight, that he had found swift consolation for his recent disappointment in a rapidly-engendered passion for the fascinating claimant to the throne of Grimland, that he was capable of offering any woman the fine spiritual worship he had accorded to the adorable Angela Knox; but to his temperament admiration came easily—and he had dined well. He had been the auditor of a wildly exciting song, had made the acquaintance of the inimitable singer, and because there was wine and music in his blood, and much beauty by his side, the nightmare of his past depression vanished into the biting air, and his pulses stirred to a lilt of amazing exhilaration.

“By Jove!” he exclaimed to himself, stealing a side glance at his companion’s bewitching profile, “Saunders is right—life is too valuable an asset to fling away in a moment’s madness. There is a beauty of the body and a beauty of the soul, and if the two are perfectly combined in only one woman in the universe, is that any reason why I should not admire a tip-tilted nose or a

curved mouth when Fate puts them within a hand's breadth of my own scrubby cheek?"

"Do you know Weidenbruck, Herr Trafford?" the Princess broke in on his silent philosophising.

"Little beyond the Hôtel Concordia," he replied. "Where are we now?"

"The Domkircheplatz. That is the Cathedral."

They were crossing a big open space, well lit, planted with trees, and adorned in its centre by a big group of statuary. To their right was a huge gothic building—a high ridged intricate structure of red sandstone—with a tangle of fretted pinnacles and flying buttresses, and a couple of lofty towers that stood out black against the starry heaven.

"A fine building!" commented the American.

"That is where I am going to be crowned," said the Princess, and she laughed a fine, free, silvery laugh that thrilled her companion with admiration.

"That's the right spirit," he said gaily; "and what's this depressing-looking place in front of us?"

"That's where I shall probably be confined," was the cheerful retort.

The building in question occupied the entire side of the square, and was as gloomy as it was vast. It was a plain rectangular structure totally devoid of ornament, and constructed of enormous blocks of rough hewn stone; irregularly spaced windows broke its sombre front with narrow slits and iron gratings, and a high-pitched roof of ruddy tiles crowned the grim precipice of enduring masonry.

"That's the Strafebburg," concluded the Princess, "the Bastile of Weidenbruck!"

"I see myself rescuing you from that topmost window," ventured Trafford.

The Princess turned half round and looked at him curiously.

"Thanks," she murmured, "but I shall keep outside as long as I can. As a foreigner you should visit it—as a sight-seer. It is a most depressing place, but there is a very valuable collection of armour and a collection of instruments of torture without its equal in Europe."

"Is it still used as a prison?" asked Trafford.

"They *say* not." There was a meaning behind her qualified denial and Trafford demanded it. "Between official statements and actual facts there is apt to be a serious discrepancy in this unfortunate land," she replied. "Officially, no one resides in the Strafebburg but the caretaker and his daughter. As a matter of fact, I am told that several political prisoners are still rotting in its dungeons."

Trafford shuddered. He was a very humane man,—despite his explosive temperament. His companion noted keenly the effect of her words, and went on:

"Officially, also, the instruments of torture went out of use one hundred and fifty years ago."

"You mean——"

"I mean," she continued, "that our dear humane monarch does not stick at trifles when his interests are threatened."

Trafford opened his eyes wide, and regarded his

companion with amazement. In his curious, excitable brain was a largely developed loathing of cruelty. Hard knocks he was prepared to give or receive in the world's battle, big risks to life and limb he was prepared to incur or inflict with heedless impartiality, but deliberate cruelty, the malicious and intentional infliction of pain on man or brute, always roused him to a frenzy of wrath. The Princess read his look and silence.

"The Archbishop of Weidenbruck, a political opponent of King Karl's, is said to have met a peculiarly terrible end," she said meaningly.

"Impossible!" muttered Trafford.

"Impossible things happen in Grimland. It is impossible, of course, that you should side against your friend, Herr Saunders, and your prospective friend, King Karl——" and she touched his hand with an unconscious impulsive movement,—"and help me in my legitimate ambitions."

Her words were in the nature of a suggestion, almost a question.

Trafford answered them between his teeth.

"That is the sort of impossibility that comes off," he muttered.

"You mean it?" demanded his fair companion, and her eyes were pleading as they had pleaded with Captain von Hügelweiler in the Thiergarten.

Trafford drank deep of their glance, and it intoxicated him.

"When I see these picturesque buildings," he returned, "with their garlands of snow and cornices of

icles, I feel I am in fairyland. And in fairyland, you know, the poor beast is changed into a handsome young man and marries the beautiful Princess." He was not insensible of his boldness, and carried it off with a laugh. "I feel the transmogrifying effects of this fairy kingdom already."

"And you are beginning to feel a handsome young man?" asked the Princess gaily.

"I have felt it this past quarter of an hour, Princess," he answered, twirling at his frozen moustache. "Already wild hopes are stirring in my bosom."

"You are not going to propose, are you?" she asked calmly, but with a most delicious quiver of the lips.

Trafford looked at his fair interrogator steadily a few seconds before replying. If ever encouragement was legible in bright eyes and challenging smile, it was writ clear in the facile features of the Princess von Schattenberg. Again he drank deep of beauty and his brain reeled among the stars.

"Not exactly a proposal, but I'll make you a proposition," he said in a voice typically American in its business-like tone.

They had entered a narrow side street, and the driver was pulling up his horse before a disreputable-looking wine shop. Dismissing the sleigh the Princess led the way into the building through a low, malodorous room—where a number of men were swilling beer, smoking, and playing dominoes—and penetrated to an inner chamber.

"And is this your home?" inquired Trafford.

"One of them," was the reply. "An outlaw must sleep where she can—it's wise to vary one's abode."

An old man in shirt-sleeves and apron entered the room and demanded their pleasure.

"We want nothing except solitude," said the Princess. "May we have that, Herr Krantz?"

"Most certainly, your High—, gracious lady. You will not be interrupted unless—"

"Thanks, good Herr Krantz, I understand."

The old landlord inclined his bald head and quitted the shabby apartment. The Princess motioned to her companion to be seated, pointing to a chair at a small table, then taking a seat opposite him, she rested her pretty head on her hands, her elbows resting on the table, and surprised him by suddenly popping out:

"And now about that proposition of yours—"

Trafford's countenance indicated that he thought that the bantering note in her voice and words was distinctly out-of-place, but notwithstanding he drew his chair closer and began:

"Princess, we have not known each other long—"

"We have not known each other at all," she quickly interrupted.

"Pardon me," corrected Trafford, with a fierce energy that always possessed him at a crisis. "You diagnosed me admirably in your dressing-room at the Eden Theatre. With equal perspicacity I have diagnosed you on our frosty drive hither. Shall I tell it?—yes? Well, then, a nature ardent but pure, fierce without being cruel, simple without being foolish. I see youth, birth and beauty blended into one ex-

hilarating whole—and I bow down and worship. To a heart like yours, nothing is impossible—not even the capacity of falling in love with an adventurous American. I do not make you a proposal of marriage, but a matrimonial proposition.” He paused to note the effect of his words before concluding with: “Now then, if by my efforts I can secure for you the throne of Grimland, will you reward me with your heart and hand?”

The Princess drew in a long breath, half-astonishment, half-admiration.

“That is one of the impossibilities that does not come off—even in Grimland,” she told him at last.

“Listen,” Trafford went on impetuously, “I shall only ask for my reward in the event of your being crowned in the Cathedral of Weidenbruck, and in the event of your acknowledging of your own free will that I have been mainly instrumental in winning you your sovereignty.”

The Princess bit her lips and nodded silently, as if weighing his words. Something, however, impelled her to make the obvious objection.

“In the event of my being crowned Queen of Grimland,” she reminded him, “I shall not be permitted to marry whom I will. If I married you without the consent of my counsellors and Parliament the marriage would be, *ipso facto*, null and void.”

“All I ask is your promise to go through the ceremony with the necessary legal and religious forms.”

The Princess remained a moment in silent thought. Then she broke out into her merriest laugh.

"We are building castles in the air," she hastened to say. "Yes, I promise—on those conditions. But you perceive the badness of the bargain you are making? A marriage that will be no marriage—a contract that will not be worth the paper it is written on?"

"I will chance its validity."

"In that event and on those conditions you shall have my hand."

The Princess stretched forth her right hand.

Trafford took it and pressed his lips to it.

"And heart?" he demanded.

As in the Thiergarten with Von Hügelweiler, the Princess Gloria hesitated momentarily, but long enough for the framing of a lie. But this time something strangled the conceived falsehood before it passed her lips.

"Alas!" she faltered. "Nature forgot to give me a heart." The words were seriously enough spoken, but somehow they did not ring true to him.

"You are incapable of love?" he asked.

The Princess flushed deeply as slowly she scanned the man who faced her. It was patent that a battle was raging in her heaving bosom. For a full half-minute silence reigned, a silence broken only by faint murmurs and the clink of beer glasses from the outer room. And all the time Trafford's face preserved an expressionless immobility, his eyes a gleam of stern directness. The Princess heaved a deep sigh. The battle was over; something was lost, something was won.

"Herr Trafford," she began in a mechanical voice, "I want to tell you the history of my maiden fancies. At the age of seventeen—when staying at Weissheim, at my father's schloss, the Marienkastel—I fell in love with a young officer in the Guides. He was handsome, aristocratic, a gallant man with a refined nature and a superb athlete as well. He loved me dearly—was more to me than my father, mother or anyone or anything in the kingdom of Grimland. But my infatuation was divined, and we were separated. I wept, I stormed, I vowed nothing would ever comfort me. Nevertheless, in six months I was a happy, laughing girl again with an intense love of life, and only an occasional stab of regret for a heart I had sworn to call my own."

Trafford's face showed his sympathy, but he did not speak.

"Then came the winter of 1904," the Princess went on with the same unemotional tone. "In our unsuccessful rebellion of that fatal winter an Englishman performed prodigies of valor. It was mainly owing to his foresight and daring that King Karl saved his throne—and my father and brother met death instead of the crown that was within their grasp. Later, it is true, this same Englishman saved my life and procured my escape from Grimland. But, even so, would any girl not dowered by Providence with a fickle disposition permit any feeling to dwell in her heart other than hate and horror for such a man? And yet, I was on the point of experiencing something more than admiration for this fearless Englishman, a second con-

quest of my heart was imminent"—she paused to scrutinise the face of the man at her side, watching keenly for some signs of disapproval—"when it was nipped in the bud, strangled in its infancy, if ever there, by his choosing a mate elsewhere. So, once again I was fancy free. What then is love—my love?" she exclaimed wistfully. "A gust that blusters and dies down, a swift passing thunder-storm, a mocking dream,"—her voice quavered and sank,—"a false vision of a sun that never rose on plain or on mountain."

Trafford met the sadness of her gaze with eyes that twinkled with a strange kindness. The story of her life had moved him strongly. At the beginning of their interview he had felt like a seafarer listening to the voice of the siren. He had been bartering his strength and manhood for the silken joys of a woman's allurements. His native shrewdness had told him that he was being enticed less for himself than the usufruct of his brain and muscles; but the bait was so sweet that his exalted senses had deemed it more than worthy of the price he paid. Had the Princess Gloria avowed a deep and spontaneous passion for him, he would not have believed her; but he would have been content, and well content, with the agreeable lie. But she had been honest with him,—honest to the detriment of her own interest.

"You don't dislike me, do you?" he blurted out, at length.

"On the contrary," she responded frankly, "I like you well, Herr Trafford."

"It would be sad otherwise," he sighed, "for I like you exceedingly well."

And at that she put her hand bravely on his shoulder and smiled at him.

"Never mind, comrade," she told him, "your heart is big enough and warm enough for two."

"*My* heart!" he exclaimed in a most lugubrious way, "my heart is several degrees colder than the ice on the Rundsee;" and added with terrible lack of tact: "whatever of warmth and fire it possessed was extinguished last Christmas Eve."

The Princess removed her hand from his shoulder in a manner that should have left no doubt in his mind of the thought behind it.

"Princess," he went blindly on, "you have told me your story, let me tell you mine—it is brevity itself."

The Princess inclined her head.

"I fell in love with a young lady named Angela Knox—an American;"—and his tone was fully as responsible as his words for bringing his companion's eyes back to his with something of the scorn his clumsy love-making deserved;—"the young lady, Angela Knox, refused me. I tried to blow my brains out, but Fate and Saunders willed otherwise. The latter advised Grimland as a hygienic antidote to *felo de se*. "Behold, then," he concluded with a sigh, "an able-bodied man with an icicle in his breast!"

Trafford spread out his hands in an explanatory gesture, and then for the first time he noted the heightened colour in the Princess's cheek, that her eyes were

aflame, and that an explosion of some kind was imminent.

“And you had the impudence to make love to me!” she cried in that wonderful voice that had captivated audiences with every intonation, from the angry tones of a jealous grisette to the caressing notes of the ingénue. “To amuse yourself by feigning a pure devotion——” But the Princess’s words failed her, and the hand of a Schattenberg was raised so threateningly,—at any rate, so it seemed to Trafford—that in surprise and consternation he rose from his chair, and as he did so, his head came in contact with the electric light, which hung low from the dingy ceiling. Simultaneously the white fire in the glass bulb was extinguished to a thin, dull red line, and in two seconds they were in total darkness.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE BARGAIN

FOR several seconds Trafford stood silent in the darkness, thinking furiously. What was the correct thing to say or do in such an unusual, almost painful, situation, he had not the faintest idea. But before speech suggested itself to his puzzled brain, his companion—not wholly successful in smothering the merriment that had instantly replaced her affectation of anger—had checked him with a warning “hush!”

Noiselessly the Princess tiptoed to the glazed partition that separated the inner chamber from the wine-shop, and drawing back a curtain gazed cautiously through the chink.

A couple of men—as indigent in appearance as the rest of the throng—had entered the shop and were talking to the landlord. The latter was all civility and smiles, but his customers were regarding the newcomers with glances of deep suspicion and resentment.

After gazing a few seconds, the Princess returned to Trafford, and taking him by the hand led him rapidly through another door into a street at the back.

“Krantz extinguished the light,” she whispered. “It was not your head, stupid, that did it! It was the danger-signal agreed upon between us—there are a couple of police agents in the shop.”

The touch of melodrama delighted Trafford, and

the presence of danger destroyed much of his embarrassment. They were in a narrow lane, lighted at rare intervals, and half choked with snow. A bitter wind blew cheerlessly between lofty houses, but the stars burned clearly in the deep violet of the heavens.

"Where now?" he asked briefly.

"Home," answered the Princess curtly. "I'm going home—good-night!"

Trafford stood irresolute. A hand was offered him in farewell. It might be tactless to enforce his society any longer, but there were reasons—the hour and the gloom of the street if nothing else—why he could not leave her alone.

"I promised to see you home," he protested stubbornly. "I keep my promises."

"You are foolish," she returned, accepting the situation and walking briskly down the street. "This quarter of Weidenbruck is anything but a safe one, despite its present tranquillity. There are queer folk dwelling in these gabled old houses—men who live by the knife and the garote! You would be wise to reseek the civilisation of the Hôtel Concordia."

"Is it necessary to insult me?" bristling.

"Ah, but you found it necessary to insult me!" she retorted.

"In what way?" staring at her in astonishment.

"By making love—such love! You nearly blow your brains out for a silly American girl, and then have the impertinence to ask me—me, the Princess Gloria von Schattenberg—to marry you, informing me casually that your heart is dead and cold."

"But your heart is dead and cold, too," he argued fatuously. "And you were not willing to accept me. It seems that we are in the same boat. We offered too little, and we asked too much."

The Princess was momentarily silenced by his logic; womanlike, however, she refused to let things end in a logical conclusion.

"I am terribly angry with you," she persisted, nevertheless, with what Trafford could have sworn was a veritable wink.

"So I was led to suppose," he replied, rubbing his head.

His words and their accompanying action, tickled the Princess's risibilities, always lying just beneath the surface. She bit her lips in a desperate effort to control, but in a moment her fine, fearless laugh rang out merrily in the deserted street. Trafford gazed in amazement at his volatile companion, and then he laughed, too.

"Don't imagine that I am not angry because I'm laughing," declared the Princess. "I have—unfortunately, perhaps—a painfully acute sense of humour. I very often laugh when I am feeling most deeply."

But Trafford having commenced to laugh, gave way to roars of laughter. He had been accorded such varied treatment, such swiftly-changing moods, that he was quite uncertain as to what the next moment would bring forth; and the atmosphere of political intrigue and romantic adventure—with its picturesque setting of ancient houses and deep snow—lifted him

into such regions of pure unreality that he laughed for very joy at the exhilarating absurdity of it all.

"Great Scott! To think I have lived eight-and-twenty years without discovering Grimland!" he exclaimed when able to catch his breath. "Princess, you must indeed forgive me. . . . It seems, besides dead hearts, we have in common a most lively sense of the ridiculous."

"I'll forgive you when you have seen me home," she replied. "But I absolutely repudiate the bargain we made at Herr Krantz's wine shop. We may have much in common . . . but surely you don't suppose that I would marry a man with a dead heart?"

"As to the bargain, I surmised as much when you raised your hand to—" he broke off suddenly, and then added: "I suppose the deal is off, then? Well, perhaps it's just as well for both of us. May I ask where your home is?"

"My home—my home for to-night—is there," said the Princess, pointing across the street to an entrance, which bore the number forty-two.

Trafford looked up at a venerable structure, which raised its steep gable somewhat higher than its neighbours.

Light shone from a window on the second story. Otherwise the façade showed a blank front of closed shutters. Just as they were crossing the snow-encumbered road, a couple of men halted before the door in question, and one of them knocked loudly. The Princess and Trafford stopped automatically. Both scented danger, one from experience, the other

from instinct. A friendly archway afforded complete concealment, and there, sheltered alike from gaze and the bitter wind, they awaited developments.

Trafford felt his arm gripped tight by a little hand, either from excitement or from a desire for protection.

"Those are Meyer's men," whispered the Princess.

Trafford nodded in reply. He was humming the Rothlied softly between his teeth. They watched for a silent moment, and then a woman answered the door. After a moment's palaver, the men went in. Simultaneously two more men glided into view from some invisible hiding-place, and took up their positions one on each side of the doorway.

"Are you armed?" asked the Princess in a whisper.

Trafford's eyes were like stars for brightness.

"I have my fists," he answered.

The Princess produced a tiny revolver from a satin handbag, which she pressed on her companion.

Trafford declined it curtly.

"I have my fists," he repeated.

The Princess regarded him with astonishment and a recrudescence of anger.

"They are trying to take my friend," she expostulated in low tones. "They will probably murder him. It is essential to my success that he escapes their clutches."

"He'll escape all right," said Trafford, with the unreasoning confidence of the born optimist; but the Princess stamped with annoyance at his folly.

Suddenly sounds of a struggle were heard from the direction of the lighted window on the second floor—

sounds of shifting feet and reeling furniture, but no cry of human throat or crack of firearm.

"I must investigate this," said Trafford, but before he could take action there was a great crash of riven glass, and a dark form fell rolling and clutching from the shattered window into the street. The fall was considerable, but the snow broke its force, and the man stirred where he lay.

"Is it he?" asked the Princess breathlessly. "No, thank God!" she answered herself as the man raised a bearded face from the snow, and groaned in agony.

"Look out!" said Trafford, for there were sounds of men descending a staircase at breakneck speed, and as he spoke a dark form issued from the doorway. As it did so, one of the two men who were waiting without, threw a cloak over the head and arms of the emerging man. Simultaneously the other raised a weapon and struck. A half-second later and another man issued from the house, and leaped like a wild beast on the back of the enmeshed and stricken man.

This was too much for Trafford's tingling nerves. Leaving the Princess where she stood in the archway, he darted across the road with the speed of a football end going down the field under a punt to tackle the opposing fullback. His passage was rendered noiseless by the soft carpet of thick snow, and he arrived unseen and unheard at the scene of the mêlée. The man with the dagger was just about to strike again. He had been making desperate efforts to do so for several moments, but his would-be victim was struggling like a trapped tiger, and the heaving, writhing mass

of humanity, wherein aggressors and quarry were inextricably entangled, offered no safe mark for the assassin's steel. However, just as his point was raised aloft with desperate intent, Trafford anticipated his action with a swinging blow on the side of the head. The man fell, dazed and stunned, against the wall. Trafford, with his fighting lust now thoroughly inflamed, turned his instant attention to the other aggressors. Now, however, he had no unprepared victim for his vigorous arm. A vile-looking ruffian, with low brow and matted hair, had extricated himself from the involved struggle, and was feeling for a broad knife that lay ready to hand in his leather belt.

With the swift acumen born of pressing danger, Trafford stooped down, and picking up a lump of frozen snow, dashed it in his enemy's face. A shrewd blow in the midriff followed this tactical success, and further punishment would have befallen the unhappy man had not his original victim, freed from two of his three aggressors, gained his feet, and in his effort to escape, cannoned so violently and unexpectedly into Trafford, that the enterprising American lost his balance and fell precipitately into the soft snow. When he regained his feet he saw a tall form flying rapidly down the street, with two assailants in hot pursuit.

"You've begun well!" said a soft voice in his ear. Trafford turned and faced the Princess.

"Begun well?" he repeated, brushing the snow from his person.

"A good beginning for your work of winning me a throne."

"I don't understand."

"Our bargain is on again," she declared, with suppressed enthusiasm, "unless you wish it otherwise?"

He looked into her fearless eyes, which fell at length before his own.

"We will let it stand," he agreed curtly. "But what of your friend?" he went on, "will he get away?"

"If he wishes," answered the Princess easily. "It would take more than two men to capture Father Bernhardt. I have no further anxiety on his account, but what about me—poor me?"

"About you?" he repeated, without understanding.

"Where am I to spend the night?"

Trafford passed his hand through his ruffled locks, dislodging therefrom several pieces of frozen snow. Then he looked at the man who had staggered under his blow against the wall, and who was eyeing them with a malignancy that bespoke rapid recuperation. The man who had fallen into the street had risen to his knees and was muttering something—a curse or a prayer—and might speedily exchange speech for action. The two pursuers of Father Bernhardt might return,—baffled of their prey and breathing threatenings and slaughter,—at any moment.

Trafford grasped the Princess's hand and dragged her across the street.

"Herr Krantz's wine shop," he insisted.

"Is in the occupation of spies," retorted the Princess.

"Then what——?"

"The Hôtel Concordia," proposed the Princess calmly.

"The Hôtel Concordia!" he echoed.

"Yes. Your sister has just arrived from England and wants a small room at the top of the house. Her luggage, naturally, has gone astray. You are a friend of Herr Saunders, and consequently above suspicion. Do not be alarmed, my friend, I shall leave early and I will pay for my bed and breakfast."

Trafford tugged each moustache violently in turn.

"So be it," he said at length. "It is all part of the bargain. Come, little new-found sister, let us find a sleigh to drive us to the Hôtel Concordia."

CHAPTER NINE

THE KING'S BREAKFAST

LIKE most members of the kingly caste, Karl XXII. was a big eater and an early riser. On the morning following Trafford's adventures in the slums of Weidenbruck, the genial monarch was breakfasting on innumerable fried eggs and abundant grilled ham at the early hour of seven. He was dressed in high, white leggings, stout boots, and a dark brown woollen jersey; and the reason of his athletic attire was a suggested ski-ing expedition in the neighbourhood of Nussheim,—a small village some ten miles distant from the capital. His Majesty was breakfasting alone save for his faithful major-domo, Herr Bomcke, an old gentleman of great dignity and superb whiskers. Bomcke moved noiselessly about the room, with one eye on his royal master's needs, and the other on the doorway, which was guarded by a young officer in a snow-white uniform and glistening steel cuirass. The apartment itself was the moderate-sized chamber where Karl was wont to conduct his private affairs. In one corner stood a satinwood bureau strewn thick with papers; in another a marble bust of his father on a malachite pedestal. Two entire sides of the room were devoted to book-shelves, which contained such diverse treasures as fifteenth-century bestiaries, "Alice in Wonderland," "Moltke's History of the Franco-Prussian War," and the Badminton volume on "Winter Sports." The whole of

the apartment had a mellow golden tinge, a soft atmosphere of affluent homeliness and regal respectability.

Just as his Majesty was consuming his fourth roll and honey, there was a whispering in the doorway and Saunders' name was announced in the mellifluous tones of the major-domo.

"Good-morning," began the King. "You are ready for our expedition, I perceive."

"My family motto is *semper paratus*—always ready," replied Saunders lightly. "But I understand our train does not start for Nussheim till 8 A. M. I came early because I wished to talk over a delicate situation with you."

"Talk away," said the King, attacking another roll, and draining his coffee cup.

"The Princess Gloria is in Weidenbruck."

Karl nodded thoughtfully.

"And her address?" he asked.

"I don't know. I did not want to know, so I refused to see her home last night."

Again the King nodded. He understood his friend's position perfectly.

"The Princess Gloria——" he began, producing an enormous meerschaum pipe, and proceeding to stuff it with some dark tobacco.

"Is being very closely watched," said a voice from the doorway. It was General Meyer, who had entered unannounced, as was his privilege.

"And how about Father Bernhardt?" grunted the King, puffing at his pipe without looking up. "He has been closely watched for some time."

"It was about him that I came to speak," said the General, walking into the middle of the room.

"You have taken him, of course," said the King. "I told you to employ four men."

"I followed your Majesty's advice," said Meyer. "I was wrong. I should have followed Herr Saunders'. He advised, if I remember rightly, a battalion of Guards and a squadron of Dragoons."

"Do you mean to say," demanded the King, with some warmth, "that four armed men were incapable of dealing with one priest?"

"So it appears," returned Meyer calmly. "They say there was some sort of a rescue. That, of course, may be a lie to excuse their failure. Any way, one of them is suffering from a broken thigh, the result of a fall from a window. Another has a dislocated jaw. Two others,—who pursued our friend down the Sichelgasse—were foolish enough to follow him along the banks of the Niederkessel. Fortunately they could both swim."

The King turned with a gesture of impatient weariness to Saunders.

"What do you say?" he demanded.

"Yes, what do you say?" said Meyer, putting up his eyeglass and fixing his glance on the Englishman.

Saunders shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I say, that there evidently must have been some sort of a rescue."

"A most determined rescue," added Meyer.

"A most determined and reckless rescue," affirmed Saunders, meeting Meyer's glance without flinching.

"But your advice, Saunders," said the King.

"I gave it you yesterday, sire. Act! Hitherto we have schemed. We have been patting the mad dog on the head, but as he still shows his teeth,—shoot him!"

"Who is the 'him'?" demanded Meyer. "The sort of person who rescues rebels when they are being arrested?"

"By mad dog," explained Saunders, "I meant the snarling, discontented, dangerous element in Weidenbruck. We have had plenty of clever schemes for pacification. What we want is a little stupid brutality."

"Saunders is right," said the King. "In theory I am a Democrat, a Socialist, a believer in the divinity of the *vox populi*. In practice I am a believer in platoon firing and *lettres de cachet*. There are only two nations in Europe who are genuinely capable of self-government, and Grimland is not one of them. We have tried the velvet glove, and we must show that it contains a hand of steel, and not a palsied member."

"So be it," said Meyer, with a slight inclination of his head. "We will give the policy of open repression a trial, a fair trial and a full trial, and may the God of Jews and Gentiles teach the loyalists to shoot straight."

Saunders scanned Meyer's face critically. There was no colour in his sunken cheek, no fire in his heavy eye. The man had no stomach for fighting, and his complex nature abhorred straightforward measures. Yet he had proved himself a faithful servant before,

and though life meant more to him than to most soldiers, he was not one to purchase personal safety by the betrayal of his sovereign.

Again Herr Bomcke upraised his honeyed tones.

"Captain von Hügelweiler," he announced.

The Captain bowed, and then stood at the salute.

"Good-morning, Captain," said his Majesty. "To what am I indebted for this honour?"

"I wish to send in my papers, sire."

"You wish to resign? What is it? Money troubles?"

The Captain hesitated.

"I am thinking of getting married, sire," he answered at length.

"Young and a bachelor," said the King, "of course you are thinking of getting married. That is very right and proper, but hardly a reason for sending in your papers."

Again Von Hügelweiler was at a loss for words, and a tinge of colour mounted to his olive cheeks.

"I am tired of soldiering," he said, after a long struggle for thought.

"Meyer," said the King, turning to his Commander-in-Chief, "is not this man a Von Hügelweiler?"

"Yes, your Majesty. A member of one of the oldest and most distinguished families in your kingdom?"

"The son of Heinrich Salvator von Hügelweiler, who fought in the trenches in '84?" persisted the monarch.

Again the Commander-in-Chief replied in the affirmative.

"He is tired of my service, Meyer," went on the King in a low voice.

Von Hügelweiler's head sank onto his breast, as if weighed down with shame.

"Your Majesty can be served in more ways than one," he murmured.

"But in none so well as by the sword," returned the King. "When an officer resigns his commission on the eve of war we call him by an ugly name, Captain."

"But we are not on the eve of war, sire," expostulated the poor Captain.

"Pardon me," said Karl, "I think otherwise."

"If there is fighting, sire, my sword is at your service."

"There is fighting and fighting," mused the King. "Fighting in the long-drawn firing-line with your nearest comrade ten yards distant, and your nearest foe a mile off; and there is fighting in the narrow street with your company shoulder to shoulder, and the enemy at the end of your swordpoint. The former needs courage, but the latter needs courage and a loyal heart. Do I make myself clear, Captain von Hügelweiler?"

Von Hügelweiler straightened himself. Life's problems seemed very puzzling just now. He had acted from the best motives in tendering his resignation, for if he decided to aid and abet the King's enemies, he preferred not to do so in the King's uniform. But the instincts of a soldier and certain splendid traditions of his family warred hard with his desires.

"I understand my resignation is not acceptable, your Majesty," he said at length.

"I neither refuse it nor accept it," said Karl. "This morning I am going ski-ing to Nussheim. I need protection these troublous times, and I am taking my Commander-in-Chief with me. I am taking Herr Saunders, who is a deadly revolver shot; I am also taking Mrs. Saunders, who has nerves of steel and the heart of an Amazon. Will you make assurance doubly sure and form part of my body-guard to Nussheim?"

Von Hügelweiler's eyes flashed proudly at the honour, and his hand went to the hilt of his sword.

"Your Majesty's safety shall be on my head," he said.

CHAPTER TEN

A SKI-ING EXPEDITION

WEIDENBRUCK lies in the wildest part of the valley of the Niederkessel. On either side,—at the distance of several miles—rise mountains of picturesque outline and considerable eminence. Prominent among these stands the Piz Schadel, a grim giant with a fatal fascination for those who affect dangerous rock-climbing. It is on the lower slopes of the Piz Schadel,—snug among its pinewoods, and facing southwards to the sun,—that the tiny village of Nussheim is situated. The little train that plies between the capital and this sunny hamlet was fairly crowded,—despite the earliness of the hour—for ski-running is a favourite amusement of Grimlanders, and the slopes of Nussheim offer an ideal ground for the exercise of that exhilarating pastime. The royal party had a carriage to themselves, and in due course they steamed through the outskirts of Weidenbruck, across the flat, snow-covered plains of the valley, and then mounted by means of a cog-wheel and a centre rail, to the little yellow station that was their objective. A party of tourists in blue glasses and check ulsters—Americans, to judge from the accent and phraseology of their leader, a tall black-bearded man with a Baedeker—got out at Nussheim and proceeded to the local hostelry. The King and his companions repaired to a small châlet, where their skis were awaiting them. Having shod themselves with

their long footgear, they sallied forth on to the snow. The sun was just rising above the opposite mountains, and the scene was one of quite extraordinary beauty. The air was still and crisp and invigorating, but so dry on this elevated plateau that there was no sensation of cold, though the thermometer gave a far lower reading than at Weidenbruck. The sky was purest ultra-marine, and in the perfect air every detail of the surrounding hills, forest, crag, and hamlet, stood out with soft distinctness. And everywhere was snow and the silence of the snows; white fields of sparkling purity swelling and falling in smooth stretches of shimmering argent. Above were dun precipices and dark green woods of larch and fir, and above, again, fairy snow-peaks, showing like dabs of Chinese white against the cloudless glory of the sky. It was a day to live and be thankful for life; a day for deep breath and noble thoughts, a day to take one's troubles to Nature and lose them in the splendid silence of her hills and the vastness of her immaculate snows.

The royal party of five shuffled along on their wooden footgear till they came to a long dip with a gentle rise at the end of it. Karl was the first to essay the descent. With knees slightly bent, one foot slightly in front of the other, his burly body noticeably inclined forward, he started on his downward course. For a second or two he moved slowly. Then the pace increased till he was travelling at a sharp speed; then, as the momentum grew, and the angle of the hillside sharpened, he fairly flew through the air in the swift, smooth rush that brings joy to the heart of the ski-runner. At the

bottom he got into some soft snow, and after a fruitless struggle with the laws of gravity, the royal equipoise was overcome, and Karl lay prone and buried in the gleaming crystals. A roar of delight burst from his companions above, and a ski-shod foot was waved answeringly in the air in plaintive rebuke at their merriment.

Mrs. Saunders was the next to come down. With perfect balance,—relying not at all on her guiding stick,—she swept down the mountain-side like a Valkyrie. With grey eyes shining with pleasure, wisps of fair hair streaming from under her woollen *béret*, she seemed the embodiment of graceful and athletic young womanhood. Her course was taking her direct on to the prostrate monarch, but at the critical moment she swung round with a superb Telemark turn, and halted to watch Karl's desperate efforts to regain an upright position.

The others descended in turn with varying elegance but without serious mishap, Von Hügelweiler bringing up the rear and nearly injuring his sovereign whom he had sworn so solemnly to defend. Onward they went again, shuffling along levels, gliding down descents, mounting laboriously sideways, like crabs, when it was necessary to reach higher ground. In the pleasurable absorption of their sport they wandered far, ever gaining fresh joys of swift descent or harmless fall, and winning fresh views of plain and wood and mountain.

“There go the Americans,” said the King to Mrs. Saunders. “They have been travelling parallel to us.”

The King's party had collected under a mutual desire for rest, by a crop of boulders which broke through the level surface of the snows.

"Parallel to us," agreed Meyer, mopping his humid face, "but I notice that they always manœuvre for the upper ground."

The King frowned at the General's speech. He was enjoying the morning's relaxation from his usual worries, and Meyer's words,—if they had any meaning at all,—suggested personal danger to himself and his friends.

"They are excellent ski-runners," said Mrs. Saunders, watching them as they moved rapidly to a point of the hill above them.

But Meyer was whispering something in the King's ear, and a vague sense of apprehension had taken the party.

Karl nodded, as one convinced against his will, and spoke briefly to the company.

"General Meyer suggests that those people may not be quite so harmless as they seem," he said. "Personally, I think he is over-suspicious, but in order to be on the safe side, I propose doubling back down the hill, and if they turn, too, and follow us, we will assume the worst."

The others received the statement in silence.

The gorgeous splendour of the day and the unmatched loveliness of the scene seemed to mock the timidity of the Commander-in-Chief's imaginings. But all present were too familiar with Grimland politics to question the prudence of the King's decision; and with

scarce a backward glance they turned round and followed General Meyer down the hillside. Presently they reached a cliff of brown rock which broke the slope of the mountain with a precipitous drop of some twenty feet. Beneath this and parallel to it Meyer decided to proceed, till the King called a halt for purposes of reconnoitering.

Far below them lay the valley of the Niederkessel, and plainly discernible were the tiny houses and toy churches of the capital. But above them it was impossible to see anything except the golden-brown wall of rock which they were following.

As swiftly as the operation permitted, Meyer slipped off his skis, bidding Von Hügelweiler do the same. The Captain was then told to stand leaning against the cliff, whereupon the Commander-in-Chief clambered bravely on to his shoulders. Then with an agility remarkable for his years, he drew himself up to the ledge of rock from which it was possible to overlook the top of the cliff. He gazed for a moment with peering eyes, the others watching with silent interest. Then he came down in a flash. "Skis on again, Captain," he said, kneeling down and inserting his foot in the shoe of his own ski. "We must run for it."

"Who are they?" demanded the King.

"There are six of them, sire," answered the Commander-in-Chief, tugging viciously at a refractory strap. "They are about five hundred yards up the hillside, and the man in the beard is Father Bernhardt!"

"Father Bernhardt in the beard!" ejaculated the others.

"In a false beard," affirmed Meyer. "He has had a fall, and one side has come unhooked. It's the ex-priest, sure enough, and full of vengeance for his last night's inconvenience. We'd better move at once."

Karl hesitated a moment.

"I don't like running away," he said, glancing at Saunders and Von Hügelweiler.

"I do," retorted Meyer, "when it's six to four in their favour. Come sire, we shall never get a better chance than this. They can't follow us direct, because of this cliff, and while they are making a detour we will push on to some spot on the railway, and hold up a train to take us back to Weidenbruck."

"The General's right," said Saunders, seeing the King hesitate. "We have a lady with us."

"Who is not in the least afraid," added the lady in question.

"That is precisely the trouble," said Saunders.

"Forward, sire!" urged Meyer, making a move. "I will lead the way, and you and Mrs. Saunders will accompany me. Von Hügelweiler and Herr Saunders will bring up the rear."

"The post of honour!" commented the King.

"If you will," said Meyer with a shrug. "I go first because I know the countryside. I am more useful so. Saunders stays behind because he is the best shot."

"A gallant fellow, our Commander-in-Chief," sneered Von Hügelweiler to Saunders, as the three others glided rapidly away down the snow-slope. The

crack of a rifle punctuated the Captain's remark. Saunders waited to make sure that neither his wife nor her escort was touched, and then produced a revolver.

"I am glad Meyer has gone on with them," he said. "He is a clever old fox, and he knows every cliff and cranny in the countryside."

Another shot rang out, but this too failed to take effect, and in a twinkling the fugitives had disappeared into the friendly shelter of a pine wood.

Saunders wore a pensive air, in marked contrast to Von Hügelweiler, who was betraying signs of strong excitement.

"Of what are you thinking?" demanded the latter.

"I am thinking that if we follow the others we shall most certainly be shot," replied Saunders.

"That is true," agreed the Captain. "Our enemies must be quite close now. It would be madness to venture out into the open."

"Precisely," said Saunders. "We are left here as a rear-guard, and it is our duty to cheek the pursuit, not to be killed. Here we are under cover, and here I propose to remain."

"The enemy will make a detour to avoid this cliff," said Von Hügelweiler, "then will come our opportunity to move out."

Saunders shook his head.

"This cliff stretches half a mile at least, in either direction," he said, "and there is broken ground beyond that. No, they won't make a detour, not if they're the good ski-runners I take them for. To a clever *ski-laufer*, a jump over a cliff like this is no

very desperate affair, and it's their only chance of nabbing Karl before he gets back to Weidenbruck."

"Then we wait here and fire at them from behind?" demanded the Captain excitedly, taking his orders from the distinguished Englishman as a matter of course.

"We pot them as they come over—like pheasants," said Saunders.

There was a smile on his face, not at the prospect of taking human life, still less at the chance of losing his own; for Saunders was not one to welcome danger for its own sake, though he could always meet it with coolness and resource. He was thinking, just then, of Trafford, and how willingly his excitable friend would have changed places with them, how jealous and annoyed he would be at learning that he, Saunders, had again the luck to be in the thick of a desperate affair. Von Hügelweiler noted the smile with admiration. Saunders was one who had a big hold on the popular imagination of Grimland, and the Captain was proud to be associated with him in an enterprise of this sort. His divided loyalty to the King and Princess was quite forgotten in the exigencies of the situation. He had a plain duty to perform,—and he hoped to perform it creditably in the eyes of the cool, smiling Englishman who had won such fame in the stirring winter of 1904.

Suddenly there was a slight scuffling sound in the snow above, and a second later something dark came over their heads like an enormous bird. It was one of their pursuers, a braced, rigid figure travelling through the air with the grace and poise of a skilled

ski-jumper. Saunders raised a steady hand and fired. Simultaneously the human projectile collapsed into a limp and shapeless mass and fell with a dead plump into a cloud of snow. A second later and another ski-jumper had darkened the heavens above them. He had heard the crack and seen his comrade fall, but it was too late to stop his progress. He turned a swarthy face with black eyes full of terror, and again Saunders' revolver spoke, and with a dull groan the man fell spread-eagled in the snow within a yard of his companion.

"Bravo! Englisher," muttered Von Hügelweiler, his eyes bright with excitement, his fingers nervously clutching the butt of his own weapon.

But Saunders' eyes were cast upwards at the jagged edge of the cliff above their heads. After a wait of some moments the face of a man peered over the skyline. Instantaneously Saunders covered it with his revolver. But the face remained, and a voice—the voice of Father Bernhardt—spoke.

"Don't fire, Herr Saunders!"

Saunders remained fixed and tranquil as a statue.

"You have killed two of my men, Englishman," went on the ex-priest.

"I think not," returned Saunders calmly. "The second man was only wounded in the thigh."

"I should be justified in taking your life for this," continued Father Bernhardt.

"Perfectly," agreed Saunders with composure, "but you will find the proceeding difficult and rather dangerous."

A low laugh followed Saunders' words.

"That's the spirit I admire!" cried the outlaw. "There's a dash of the devil about that—and the devil, you know, is a particular friend of mine."

"So I have been led to understand," said Saunders drily.

Again the outlaw laughed.

"Come," he said, "will you make a truce with us? We could probably kill you and your friend there, but we should lose a man or two in the killing. Make truce, and we give you a free return to Weidenbruck, or wherever you choose to go. Your friend Karl has got away safely now,—thanks to your infernal coolness,—so you can make peace with honour."

Saunders shrugged his shoulders.

"If my friend, Captain von Hügelweiler, agrees," he said, "I consent. Only there must be no further pursuit of us or the royal party."

"I give my word," said Bernhardt.

"Can we trust it?" whispered Von Hügelweiler. But the ex-priest overheard, and for answer clambered down the cliff beside them.

Von Hügelweiler was no coward, but something made him give ground before the strange individual who confronted him. A man of medium height and compact build, there was a suggestion of great muscularity about the outlaw's person. But it was the face rather than the body which compelled attention. The clean-carved, aquiline features, the black, bushy eyebrows, the piercing eyes, and the strange, restless

light that played in them, made up a personality that set the turbulent rebel as a man apart from his fellows.

"Now, then," he said, thrusting his face into Von Hügelweiler's, "shoot me, and earn the eternal gratitude of your sovereign."

Again the Captain gave ground, though his timidity shamed and irritated him.

"I am not a murderer," he said, flushing. "You come to parley, I imagine."

"I come to shake Saunders by the hand," said the outlaw, turning and stretching out a sudden hand to the Englishman. "He is a man, a stubborn fellow, with a brain of ice and nerves of tested steel. I would sooner have him on my side than a pack of artillery and the whole brigade of Guards."

"You flatter me," said Saunders, taking the proffered hand. "I am a man of peace."

"How lovely are the feet of them that bring us good tidings of peace," said the outlaw with a scornful laugh. "Behold Satin also can quote the Scriptures! When I sold my soul three years ago to the Father of Lies I drove a fine bargain. I took a Queen to wife —such a Queen, such a wife! And my good friends Ahriman, the Prince of Darkness, and Archmedai, the Demon of Lust, have given me strength and health and cunning beyond my fellows, so that no man can bind me or prevail against me. They never leave me long, these good fiends. It was one of them who warned me not to lead the pursuit of Karl over this bit of cliff."

Von Hügelweiler shuddered, but Saunders looked the outlaw steadily in the face.

"Your nerves are out of gear, Bernhardt," he said.
"Did you ever try bromide?"

"I've tried asceticism and I've tried debauchery," was the leering answer, "and they both vouchsafe visions of the evil one. When I was a priest I lived as a priest: I scourged myself and fasted; but the Prince of Power of the Air was never far from me. And now that I am of the world, worldly, a sinner of strange sins, a blasphemer, and a wine-bibber, Diabolus and his satellites are in even more constant attendance on me. Perhaps I am mad, or perhaps they are there for such as me to see."

"I'd chance the former alternative and see a brain specialist," suggested Saunders. "It might save a deal of wasted blood and treasure to Grimland."

"There is no healing for a damned soul," said Bernhardt fiercely. "I saw strange things before I drank the libidinous cup of Tobit. I see them now. Saint or sinner, my eyes have been opened to the unclean hosts of Beelzebub."

Saunders offered the unhappy man a cigarette.

"Saints and sinners generally do see things," he said dispassionately. "I am neither, and my vision is normal. If you would live a reasonable life for six months you might become a useful member of society instead of a devil-ridden firebrand. Fasting is bad and excess is bad. One starves the brain, the other gluts it. Both lead to hallucinations. Take hold of life with both hands and be a man with normal appe-

tites and reasonable relaxations, and you will have men and women for friends, not the unclean spawn of over-stimulated brain-cells."

A puzzled look crept into Father Bernhardt's eyes. Then he shook his head firmly.

"I won't talk to you any more," he cried angrily. "I hate talking to you. I hate your cursed English common sense. If I saw much of you I'd lose all the savour of life. I'd be a decent, law-abiding citizen, and miss all the thrills and torments of a man fire-doomed."

"A good conscience is not a bad thing," said Saunders, "and a man at peace with himself is king of a fine country. You're a youngish man, Bernhardt, and the world's before you. Give up listening to devils, and the devils will give up talking to you. Go on listening to them and the fine balances of sanity will be overthrown for ever."

"Silence!" cried the ex-priest, thrusting his fingers in his ears. "Would you rob me even of my remaining joys? For such as me there is no peace. I have my mission, and by the devil's aid I must perform it!"

"We all have missions," retorted Saunders. "Mine apparently is to preserve Karl from assassination. I don't boast a body-guard of demons, but I'll back my luck against yours, Father Bernhardt."

The outlaw smiled again at these words.

"Good-bye, Englishman," he said, "I love you for your courage. Go in peace," he went on, shaking him by the hand, but ignoring Von Hügelweiler altogether. "But take heed to yourself, for you are

pitting yourself against a man who is neither wholly sane nor wholly mad, and therefore entirely to be feared. Good-bye, and tell the Jew Meyer that to-night I am dwelling in the Goose-market, at the house of Fritz Birnbaum, the cobbler. Let him send to take me and see whether he is stronger than my dear allies, Archmedai and Ahriman."

"I will make a point of doing so," said Saunders, preparing to depart, "and I will lay a shade of odds on the Jew."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE IRON MAIDEN

WHILE the Englishman was ski-running and saving the King's life, the American had spent an uneventful morning seeing the sights of the capital. Acting on his friend's advice he had visited the Reichs Museum, wherein were housed some extremely old Masters, some indifferent modern sculpture, and a wholly admirable collection of engravings by Albrecht Dürer. But Trafford's mind had wandered from pre-Raphaelite anatomy and marble modernities to a pair of dark eyes, a finely chiselled little nose, and a diminutive mouth, that were utterly unlike anything depicted by Botticelli, Fra Angelo, or the great Bavarian engraver.

Art had never held an important place in his mind, and on this fine January morning it competed feebly with a certain restless longing that had stolen over his ill-balanced nervous system, to the domination of his thoughts and the destruction of his critical faculties. He desired to be out in the open air, and he desired to see, and touch, and speak with a certain young woman who had passed herself off as his sister at his hotel, but who had disappeared into thin air long before he had tasted his *petit déjeuner* of coffee and rolls. It was not, he told himself, that he was in love. Love,—as he conceived it,—was something akin to worship, a regard pure as the snows, passionless almost in its

humility and reverence. For one woman he had felt that marvellous adoration ; he would never feel it again for any woman in the world. But beauty appeals even to those who have suffered at beauty's hands, and the Princess Gloria was a maiden of such bewildering moods, so compounded of laughter and fierceness, of such human pathos and relentless purpose, that she was bound to have a disturbing effect on so responsive and sensitive a soul as his. He acknowledged the obsession, for it was patent and paramount. But he told himself that in his regard there were no deeps, certainly no worship ; merely a desire to cultivate an attractive young woman whose habitual behaviour was as heedless of the conventions as his own.

But this desire took him out of the long galleries of the Reichs Museum into the slums of Weidenbruck, into the purlieus of the Goose-market and the Grass-market, and into the network of narrow alleys round about the Schugasse. But the face and figure that were in his mind's eye refused to grace his bodily sight, and so,—having lost himself half a dozen times and gained a magnificent appetite,—he took a sleigh and drove back to the Hotel Concordia.

In the middle of his meal Saunders arrived, and told him at full length of his morning's adventures. And, as Saunders had expected, Trafford's disappointment at having missed the exhilarating rencontre with Father Bernhardt was palpable and forcibly expressed.

“ Confound your beastly luck ! ” he said. “ And, I suppose,—thanks to your brilliant shooting, and tactful diplomacy,—the King got away.”

"He got home safely with my wife and General Meyer three-quarters of an hour before I did," replied Saunders, ignoring the sarcasm. "They held up a train on the big stone viaduct, and I and Von Hügelweiler tapped one at a small station called Henduck. It is a pity you were not with us, Nervy."

Trafford ground his teeth. His companion was very irritating.

"What about this afternoon?" he asked despairingly.

"I'm afraid there won't be any excitements this afternoon," replied Saunders blandly. "I've got to accompany Karl to a bazaar in aid of distressed gentle-women. As you are dining to-night at the palace, we shall, of course, meet. Au revoir till then. You might well have another look at those Dürers."

"D—— the Dürers!" said Trafford angrily, as his friend left the dining-room. "And hang Saunders for a selfish brute!" he added to himself. "He lures me out to this infernal country, and then sends me to picture galleries and museums while he shoots people 'ski-jumping over his head.' And with the air of an aggrieved man Trafford kindled an enormous cigar and sauntered forth into the hall.

As he did so, he was approached by the concierge.

"A letter, mein Herr," said the official: "a messenger left it a moment ago."

Trafford took it, and as he read his eyes opened in astonishment, and his mouth in satisfaction.

"Dear Herr Trafford," it ran. *"This is to thank you for what you did for me last night. You fight as*

well as you skate—and that is saying much. If you will meet me at the Collection of Instruments of Torture in the Strafeburg at three o'clock this afternoon, I shall try to be as fascinating as you could wish me—and take back any unkind word I may have spoken.

G. V. S."

Trafford chuckled to himself. After all, he reflected, Saunders was not having all the fun. He had not mentioned his adventures of the previous evening to his friend, because he knew that Saunders would disapprove of his action in abetting Karl's enemies. He, however, was a free lance, and if he was not permitted to save the King's life, he might as well devote his energies to the equally romantic task of protecting the rebel Princess. And in his rapture at the unfolding prospect of unlimited fracas, he chuckled audibly.

Then, turning somewhat abruptly, he bumped into a gentleman, who must have been standing extremely close behind him. Instinctively he thrust his letter into his pocket, realising that the missive was not merely a private but a secret one. He half-feared that the person into whom he had cannoned,—and whose approach he ought to have heard on the marble-paved hall,—might have been covertly reading his letter over his shoulder; nor was he particularly reassured at finding that the individual in question was none other than General Meyer.

"I beg your pardon," began the Commander-in-Chief, "but I was not quite sure that it was you, as I could not see your face while you were reading your letter."

"My fault entirely," said Trafford genially.
"Were you looking for me?"

"I was. I came to say that the command which his Majesty graciously issued to you to dine with him to-night is also extended to your sister."

"My sister!" repeated Trafford, in dazed accents.

Meyer smiled at the other's mystification. "I was informed at the bureau that your sister was staying at the hotel with you," he said blandly.

Instantly the fraud of the previous evening returned to Trafford's memory.

"She spent last night at the hotel," he said, "but she left early this morning."

"A brief visit!" was the General's comment.

"Extremely! She is on her way to Vienna. She—she took the opportunity of paying me a flying visit to see me compete for the King's Cup on the Rundsee. She went on by the 8:35 this morning."

Meyer nodded, as if appreciating the other's glibness.

"Would you think me very inquisitive," he went on, "if I asked at what hotel she will be staying in Vienna?"

"She is not going to a hotel," replied Trafford. "She is going to stay with my aunt,—my dear Aunt Martha,—whose address I cannot for a moment recall. I shall doubtless hear from her in a day or so, when I will communicate her whereabouts to you—if you particularly desire it."

"Please do not trouble," said the General, scrutinising his companion closely through his eye-glass. "But

there is one further question I would put to you. How is it that Saunders does not even know that you have a sister?" Meyer's tones were of the blandest, but there was something in his look and bearing that bespoke suspicions that had become certainties. Trafford read danger in the mocking voice and smiling lips, and he grew wonderfully cool.

"That's dead easy!—she's only my half-sister," he replied. "We see little of each other. Saunders may well have never chanced to meet her or even hear of her. My half-sister, you know, detests men. In fact, my only fear of her going to Vienna is lest she should at once enter a nunnery and never be seen again."

Meyer dropped his eye-glass in a facial convulsion of admiration.

"Au revoir, Herr Trafford!" he said, with a gracious bow. "We meet at eight o'clock at the Palace tonight. But I am desolated at the idea of not seeing—your half-sister."

Shortly after the Commander-in-Chief's departure, Trafford donned his overcoat and sallied forth on foot to the Strafeburg. The beauty of the day was gone. The mist that had been dispelled by the noonday sun had settled down again on the city. The penetrating cold, born of a low temperature and a moisture-laden atmosphere, nipped and pinched the extremities, and ate its way behind muscles and joints till Trafford,—despite his warm coat,—was glad enough to reach the friendly shelter of the ancient prison-house. A half-krone procured him admission to the show-rooms of the

famous building, and a young woman, angular of build and exceptionally tall, took him under her bony wing, and commenced to show him the objects of interest. Trafford had come to see something less forbidding than racks and thumb-screws, but for the moment the object of his visit being nowhere to be seen, he devoted a temporary interest to the quaint and sinister-looking objects displayed on all sides of him. These,—as has already been made clear,—were mainly the ingenious contrivements of filthy minds for the infliction of the utmost possible suffering on human beings. A judiciously-displayed assortment of racks, wheels, water-funnels, and other abominations, soon had the effect of making Trafford feel physically sick. Nor was his horror lessened by the custodian's monotonous and unemotional recital of the various uses to which the different pieces of mechanism could be put. And as his thoughts travelled back across the centuries to the time when men did devil's work of maiming and mutilating what was made in God's own image, a fearful fascination absorbed the American's mind, so that he quite forgot the Princess in a sort of frenzy of horror and wrathful mystification.

In the third room they visited,—a gaunt department of deeply-recessed windows and heavy cross-beams,—was an assortment of especially ferocious contrivements.

“This was used for those who made bad money,” went on the long-limbed maiden, in her droning monotone, indicating a gigantic press which was capable of converting the human frame into the semblance of a

pancake. "The coiner lay down here, and the weights were put on his chest——"

"Stop! for heaven's sake," ejaculated Trafford, white with emotion. "If I could get hold of one of those mediæval torturers I'd give him a good Yankee kick to help him realise what pain meant."

"I'm sure your kick would be a most enthusiastic one," said a voice at his elbow. A lady in handsome furs and a blue veil—a common protection, in Grimland, against snow-glare—was addressing him. Despite this concealment, however, Trafford did not need to look twice before recognising the Princess Gloria.

"You can leave us, Martha," commanded the Princess to the angular attendant. "I am quite capable of describing these horrors to this gentleman. I am sufficiently familiar with the Strafebburg, and shall quite possibly become more so." Then, as the obedient Martha withdrew her many inches from the room:

"I want to thank you for last night's work," she said to Trafford; "and if I may, to ask——"

"Charmed to have been of service," interrupted the American, and taking the Princess's hand, he bent low and kissed it. As he raised his head again there was a flush in his cheek and a fire in his eye that seemed portents of something warmer than the Platonism of a dead soul. "But don't resume the hospitality of the Concordia," he added. "Meyer suspects, and my lying capacities have been well-nigh exhausted."

"He has been cross-questioning you?"

"Most pertinaciously; but I lied with fluency and fervour."

The Princess laughed gaily.

" You are splendid!" she cried, clapping her hands with girlish excitement. " Do you know," she went on presently, " that the authorities, acting under Herr Saunders' advice, are going to adopt strenuous measures against us? "

" Is that anything new? "

" Not exactly. But they have decided to leave off trying to murder us, and are going to try and take us openly. The ex-Queen,—whose nerves are not very good,—has already crossed the frontier into Austria. Father Bernhardt has found several new hiding-places, and a brace of new revolvers."

" And you? " asked Trafford.

" Have found you, " she answered with a frank smile.

" Admirable! " laughed the American. " But tell me, pray, how I can serve you."

" You will be dining at the Palace to-night. Find out all you can and report to me."

Trafford was silent. He was about to dine with the King, and he had certain scruples about the sacredness of hospitality. Quick as a flash the Princess read his silence, and bit her lip.

" Now then, " she said, as if to change the subject, " let me play the part of showman. Here we have the famous ' Iron Maiden.' "

Trafford beheld a weird sarcophagus set upright against the wall, and rudely shaped like a human form. On the head were painted the lineaments of a woman's face, and the mediæval craftsman had contrived to portray a countenance of abominable cruelty, not devoid

of a certain sullen, archaic beauty. A vertical joint ran from the crown of the head to the base, and the thing opened in the middle with twin doors. The Princess inserted a heavy key,—which was hanging from a convenient nail,—and displayed the interior.

“Now you see the charm of the thing,” she went on, as the inside of the iron doors revealed a number of ferocious spikes. “The poor wretch was put inside, and the doors were slowly shut on him. See, there is a spike for each eye, one for each breast, and several for the legs. The embrace of the Iron Maiden was not a thing to be lightly undertaken.”

“Of all the fiendish, hellish——”

“It was made by one Otto the Hunchback,” pursued the Princess, “and it was so admired in its day, that the reigning monarch of Bavaria had a duplicate made, and it stands in the castle of Nuremberg to this day.”

“When was this thing last used?” inquired Trafford in hoarse tones.

“It is said that the late Archbishop of Weidenbruck was killed in this way, three years ago,” replied the Princess calmly.

Trafford was white with indignation.

“Who says so?” he demanded fiercely.

“Everybody. The King hated him, and he died of cancer—officially. I was told—and I honestly believe—that he was killed by torture, because when the troubles of 1904 were at an end, he openly incited the people to revolt.”

“If that’s true,” said Trafford, “I shan’t make

much bones about siding with you against Karl XXII. 'And it won't worry my conscience reporting to you anything I may accidentally overhear at the dinner to-night."

"We can't fight in kid gloves," said the Princess with a sigh.

A sudden noise in the street without attracted his attention. Light as a bird, the Princess leaped into the embrasure of the window. Trafford followed suit. A company of soldiers was drawn up outside the building, and facing them was a fair-sized mob jeering and cheering ironically. A number of units were detached under an officer to either side of the building, and it was plain that the Strafeburg was being surrounded by the military. A second later there was the dull sound of hoofs on snow, and a squadron of cavalry entered the *platz* from another direction. Lined up at right angles to the Strafeburg, carbine on knee, they held the threatening mob in hand with the silent menace of ball and gunpowder.

Trafford and the Princess looked at each other in blank and silent amazement.

"This means business," said the latter, pale but composed. "The Guides and the King's Dragoons are not being paraded for nothing. Royalty is going to be arrested with the pomp and circumstance due to the occasion."

"They have discovered your presence here?"

"Obviously. I am caught like a rat in a trap."

Trafford scanned the bloodless but firm countenance, and admired intensely. Here was no hysterical school-

girl playing at high treason for sheer love of excitement, but a young woman who was very much in earnest, very much distressed, and at the same time splendidly self-controlled. He stood a moment thinking furiously with knitted brows, hoping that his racing thoughts might devise some scheme for averting the impending tragedy. The room they were in was the last of a series, and possessed of but one door. To return that way was to come back inevitably to the entrance hall,—a proceeding which would merely expedite the intentions of their enemies. He looked hopelessly round the chamber, and he dashed across to the great stone fireplace. It would have formed an admirable place of concealment had not its smoke aperture been barred with a substantial iron grille.

"It's no use," sighed the Princess wearily. "I must face my fate. Perhaps the good burghers will effect a rescue."

"Not if the King's Dragoons do their duty," retorted Trafford grimly. "Mob-heroism is not much use against ball-cartridges."

"Then I must yield to the inevitable."

Trafford shook his head fiercely.

"That is just what you must not do!" he cried. For a moment he stood irresolute, running his hand through his stiff, up-standing hair.

"I've got some sort of an idea," he said at length.

Approaching a table whereon were displayed a number of torture implements, he selected a pair of gigantic pinchers that had been specially designed for tampering with human anatomy, and applied them vigor-

ously to the nuts which fixed the spikes of the Iron Maiden.

"Otto the Hunchback little knew that his *chef d'œuvre* would be put to such a benevolent purpose as a refuge," he said, as he loosened and withdrew the spikes one by one from their rusty environment. "Given ten minutes' respite, and I'll guarantee a hiding-place no one in his senses will dream of searching."

"Quick, quick, quick!" cried the Princess in a crescendo of excitement, transformed again from a pale, hunted creature to a gleeful schoolgirl playing a particularly exciting game of hide-and-seek. "I hear them searching the other rooms. Quick!"

Trafford deposited the last spike in the pocket of his overcoat, and motioned to his companion to enter. When she had done so, he closed the doors, locked them, and put the key into his pocket with the spikes.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"Quite comfy, thanks," answered a muffled voice.

Trafford contemplated the exterior of the Iron Maiden, and was pleased to note air-holes in the Maiden's ears. It had not been the intention of the mediæval tormentor that his victims should die of suffocation.

A few moments later there was the tread of martial steps along the passage, and the door was thrown open. Trafford buried himself in the contemplation of a water-funnel that had served to inconvenience human stomachs with an intolerable amount of fluid.

"Herr Trafford once again!"

The gentleman addressed looked up and beheld the grey-coated figure of General Meyer. Behind him with drawn swords were two officers of the Guides.

"Fancy meeting you again," went on the Commander-in-Chief, putting his eye-glass to his eye, and smiling his most innocent smile.

"*Your* presence is really more remarkable than mine," returned Trafford. "I am a stranger seeing the sights of Weidenbruck. *You* apparently are here on sterner business."

"I am here to effect an important arrest," drawled the General. "But perhaps you can aid us in our purpose," he went on in his blandest tones. "Have you by any possible chance seen a young woman hereabouts?"

"I saw one here only a few minutes back."

The General produced a note-book—the same in which he had jotted down the marks of the skating competition.

"This is most interesting," he said. "I need hardly ask you to be precise in your information, as your remarks will be taken down verbatim."

"I will be accuracy itself," said Trafford with mock seriousness.

"Good! When did you see this woman?"

"About a quarter of an hour ago."

"Her name?"

"I am ignorant of it."

"Her age?"

"I am bad at guessing ladies' ages; but I should say between twenty and thirty."

"Dark or fair?"

"Dark."

"I thought so. Her height—approximately?"

"Six foot two."

Meyer stiffened himself indignantly, and the eye-glass dropped from his eye.

"You are trifling, sir," he said angrily.

"Perhaps I have exaggerated," said Trafford calmly, "put down six foot one-and-a-half."

Meyer darted a sidelong glance at the American, and scribbled something in his book.

"Remember," he said, "that you may be called upon to substantiate that statement, and that false information——"

"He must be referring to Martha," broke in one of the attendant officers.

"Martha!" cried Trafford delightedly. "Yes, I believe that was her name. In return for half a krone she told me more in five minutes about instruments of torture than my wildest imagination had conceived possible."

"You have seen no one else?" rapped out the General.

"Till you arrived I have not seen a soul."

Meyer glanced round the room carefully. He looked under the several tables whereon the exhibits were displayed; he put his head up the great stone fireplace; his glance swept past the Iron Maiden, but it rested on it for a fraction of a second only.

"She is not here," he announced decisively, "this gentleman has been speaking the truth."

"A foolish habit of mine, but ineradicable," murmured Trafford ironically.

Meyer readjusted his eye-glass and turned, smiling, to the American.

"You behold in me," he said, "a disappointed man. For the second time in two days I have blundered. It is a coincidence, a strange coincidence. Also it is regrettable, for I am rapidly dissipating a hard-earned reputation for astuteness. Once again, au revoir, my dear Herr Trafford! We shall meet at dinner tonight, and I hope often. Gentlemen of the Guides, *vorwärts!*"

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE SIMPLE POLICY

THE royal palace of Weidenbrück—the Neptunburg, as it is called, after a leaden statue of the sea god which stands in its central courtyard—is a Renaissance structure of considerable size and dignity. Its main façade,—a pompous, Palladian affair of superimposed pilasters, stone vases and floral swags,—fronts the Königstrasse, a wide thoroughfare joining the northern suburbs with the Cathedral Square. Internally, there is a fine set of state-rooms, a florid chapel, and the famous muschel-saal, an apartment decorated with shells, coral, pieces of amber, marble, and porphyry, and other semi-precious material. It was into this apartment, scintillating with light and colour, that Trafford found himself ushered on his arrival at the royal domain.

General Meyer, resplendent in a pale blue and silver uniform and sundry brilliant orders, received him and presented him to his wife, a handsome lady of South-American origin and an ultra-Republican love of finery. Saunders was there, also with his wife, the latter beautiful and stately as a statue, in an empire gown of creamy green with red roses at her breast. There was an old gentleman with a billowy white moustache, and a young officer of the Guides. There were the diplomatic representatives of France and England, and a

bevy of court ladies with the expensive paraphernalia of plumes, egrets, and voluminous trains. The company was a decorative one, and the setting sumptuous, only needing the sun of the royal presence to gild the refined gold of the exhilarating scene.

Saunders took an early opportunity of drawing Trafford apart.

"Nervy, my boy," the former began, "the King, Meyer, and myself have been having a little private conversation about you."

"A most interesting topic, to be sure."

"Most. The conclusion we arrived at was that you had been making an idiotic ass of yourself."

"Details, dear flatterer?" demanded Trafford.

"This sister business!" expostulated Saunders. "Why, everybody knows you arrived at the Hôtel Concordia by yourself, and without expectation of a visit from any relative."

"Everybody knows it?" queried Trafford blandly.

"By everybody, I mean the police, who study most things, and particularly the visitors' list at the 'Concordia.' The hall-porter of that excellent hotel is one of Meyer's most trusted agents, and there is not the slightest doubt that it was the Princess Gloria who enjoyed the privilege of claiming you as a brother."

"A half-brother," corrected Trafford.

"A half-brother, then," growled Saunders. "Anyhow, it is established beyond a doubt that you have helped the Princess by every means in your power."

"Then we will admit what is universally known," said Trafford coolly. "Only, I don't agree with your

description of me as an idiotic ass. I came out here for excitement, and as you don't seem willing to provide me with it, I am finding it for myself. Besides, the Princess is a splendid little person, and to cultivate her society is the act not of an ass, but of a philosopher."

"That sort of philosophy leads to the Strafeburg," retorted Saunders. "Be warned, old friend. I know more about this charming country than you do. You have won the King's Prize. Wrap it in tissue paper and take it by the midnight express to Vienna. There is excellent skating to be had there—and you may come across your half-sister."

"My dear humourist," said Trafford, smiling and twirling his moustache. "I have no further use for—half-sisters."

Saunders started in amazement, not at the words themselves, but at their tone, and the twinkle that accompanied them.

"Nervy, Nervy Trafford," he said solemnly. "Do you suppose a Schattenberg sets her cap at an American! If she wins a throne,—as she may for all I know,—you will be put in a row with other gallant dupes of her witchery, and you will be allowed to kiss her hand every first and second Thursdays. Give it up, man," went on Saunders more heartily. "Give up playing poodle-dog to beauty in distress. You will get plenty of scars and very few lumps of sugar. Moreover, you may take it from me that a sterner policy of suppression is being pursued. There are important arrests impending."

"Important arrests!" echoed Trafford, laughing softly. "Why, I was the means of spoiling one this afternoon. I was in the Strafeburg with the Princess when Meyer turned up with foot and horse to arrest the poor child. Not wishing to witness a pathetic scene, I unscrewed the spikes of the Iron Maiden, and popped Gloria von Schattenberg inside the barbarous contrivance. Needless to say, no one, not even Meyer, thought of looking in such an impossible hiding-place. So you see, my British friend, important arrests sometimes fail to come off."

"Sometimes, but not invariably," said a voice close by the American's ear. Trafford shuddered rather than started, for he recognised the acid tones of General Meyer, and he was getting used to finding that gentleman near him when he believed him far away. But the words depressed him, nevertheless, for they held a note of ruthless certainty that smelled of damp walls and barred windows. He realised that he had made an enemy, a personal enemy, who was not likely to respect the liberty of a young foreigner who baulked his choicest schemes.

"I stepped across the room to warn you of the King's entrance," went on the General suavely. "His Majesty is on the point of entering the chamber."

A door was flung open by liveried and powdered menials. The company drew itself into two lines, and between them, smiling, portly, debonair, walked the big, half-pathetic, half-humorous figure of the King. He bowed to right and left, murmuring conventional terms of greeting to all and sundry.

To the American he said:

"I congratulate you heartily, Herr Trafford, on winning my skating prize. I am a great admirer of the nation to which you have the privilege to belong."

Trafford bowed, and took the King's hand, which was extended to him.

"To-morrow," went on the monarch, "I am going to Weissheim, land of clean snow, bright suns, and crisp, invigorating air! Farewell, then, to Weidenbruck, with its penetrating chilliness, its vile, rheumatic fogs, and its viler and more deadly intrigues! Then hurrah for ski and skate and toboggan, and the good granite curling-stone that sings its way from crampit to tee over the faultless ice! What say you, Saunders?"

"I say hurrah for winter sport, your Majesty, and a curse on fogs, meteorological and political!"

Dinner was a meal of splendid dulness. Excellent viands, faultless champagne, and a gorgeous display of plate were not in themselves sufficient to counteract the atmosphere of well-bred boredom that sat heavy on the company. The King made desperate efforts to sustain his rôle of exuberant geniality, but his wonted spirits flagged visibly as the evening wore on, and it was clear that the events of the morning had left him depressed and heart-weary. Saunders, indeed, chatted volubly to Meyer's better-half, a lady who talked politics with a reckless freedom that was palliated by occasional flashes of common sense. Meyer himself,—glass in eye, tasting each dish and sipping each wine with the slow gusto of the connoisseur,—maintained an

epigrammatic conversation with Mrs. Saunders, whose ready tongue had nearly as keen an edge as his own. But poor Trafford,—despite a healthy appetite and an appreciation of his high honour,—was enjoying himself but little. The lady whom he was privileged to sit next to,—the Frau Generalin von Bilderbaum, *née* Fräulein von Helder, formerly maid of honour to the ex-Queen,—was a wife of the General with the snowy moustache, and her sole topic of conversation was her husband. She was a lady of immense proportions and a more than corresponding appetite, and her devotion to her spouse would have been more romantic, had she possessed features as well as contours. During the meal Trafford was much enlightened as to the loyal and devoted career of General von Bilderbaum and the digestive capacities of an ex-maid of honour.

“The General fought with distinction in the trenches at Offen in '84, and he took part also with great distinction in the hill fighting round about Kurdeburg in '86. In '87——” Fortunately for Trafford the flow of the worthy lady's recital was checked. A menial, pompous, in plush and yellow braid, put his powdered head between him and his persecutrix, whispering in his ear: “His Majesty will take wine with you, sir.”

Trafford looked up to the end of the table where the King sat. King Karl, with raised glass and a resumption of his genial smile, was endeavouring to catch his eye.

Trafford raised his glass and flushed. It is not given to every man to be toasted by a reigning sovereign, and Trafford felt a sense of pride that surged

up in his bosom with no little strength. Then the incongruity of his position struck him. There was he, eating the King's food, and drinking the King's wine, and at the same time pledged to help and abet his most relentless enemy. Nay, more, he had sworn to abuse his hospitality that evening by gleaning any facts which might help the rebellious Princess to continue free to work out her ambitious and subversive propaganda. And now he was signalled out for especial honour, and he blushed, not because the eyes of the ladies regarded him with frank admiration, not because Meyer looked sideways at him with sneering inscrutability, but because his host, the King, regarded him with a glance that was all welcome and good fellowship. And in the emotion and excitement of the moment Trafford recalled Saunders' favourable opinion of King Karl, rather than the Princess Gloria's sinister suggestion of the torture-chamber. But just as, with mixed feelings and mantled cheek, he threw back his head to empty his glass, a noise from outside attracted his attention. It was a low, humming noise at first, with sharp notes rising from its depths. But it grew louder, and something in its swelling vibrations checked the glass untasted in his hand. Men and women looked at each other, and the conversation ceased automatically. Louder the noise grew—louder, till it was like the roaring of a great wind or the snarling of innumerable wild beasts. And yet, besides its note of wrath and menace, it held a sub-tone of deep, insistent purpose. Fair cheeks began to blanch, and an air of pained expectancy hung heavy on the throng. For there was

no longer any possibility of mistaking its import. It was the hoarse murmur of a mob, wherein the mad fury of beast and element were blended with human hatred, and dominated by human intelligence.

Meyer sipped his wine composedly, but his face was a sickly green. General von Bilderbaum flushed peony, and Trafford felt big pulses beating in different parts of his body. The situation was intolerable in its frozen anxiety. With an oath the King rose to his feet, threw back the great purple curtains that masked the windows, and flung open the tall casements. A redoubled roar of voices flowed in with a stream of icy air. The ladies shuddered in their *décolleté* gowns, but Trafford,—heedless alike of frost and etiquette,—was on the balcony in an instant by the King's side, looking down on the great street. The other men followed suit immediately, and the sight that met their gaze was a stirring one. The broad Königstrasse, which ran past the palace, was packed with a dense and swaying throng.

In the midst of a bevy of dark-coated police walked a tall figure, handcuffed, bareheaded, his clothes torn as if he had been taken with violence, yet retaining withal an air of fierce scorn and tameless pride. On each side of the police tramped companies of infantry with fixed bayonets. At the head and at the rear of the little procession rode formidable detachments of the King's Dragoons. And surging behind, menacing, furious, determined,—yet held in check by the cold logic of steel and bullet,—pressed and swayed and shouted a great mass of turbulent humanity.

"They are arresting Father Bernhardt," drawled General Meyer, who surveyed the scene through his eye-glass and with a slight smile. "This is an illuminating example of the straightforward policy of repression."

"At any rate, he *is* being arrested," said the King. "Under your system he was always on the point of being arrested. Once inside the Strafeburg, Father Bernhardt will not derive much assistance from his noisy friends out here."

"Once inside the Strafeburg—yes!" sneered Meyer. "But there is still a quarter of a mile to be traversed; and unless I mis-read the temper of the good Weidenbruckers, there will be some sort of attempt at a rescue in a minute or two."

"Why don't they fire on the mob?" spluttered out General von Bilderbaum, stifling a fine military oath in his billowy moustache.

"Because I ordered the Colonel commanding the Dragoons not to fire unless a rescue was actually being attempted," answered Meyer. "Revolutions are stupid things, and are best avoided when possible."

"I'd fire on the brutes if I were in command," murmured the old General with suppressed fierceness, as the crowd pressed close at the heels of the last file of Dragoons.

Hardly had he spoken when a harsh order rang out above the growling of the mob, the rear rank swung their horses round, and with a click of carbines a volley rang out into the icy air. A bullet struck the stonework of the palace, not far from the King's head,

for the soldiers had fired purposely in the air. Karl never even winced. His features wore a look of pained distress that no personal danger could accentuate. General Meyer quietly took cover behind a friendly pilaster, but Trafford,—wildly excited by the novel scene,—watched eagerly the quick panic of the mob. Helter-skelter they ran, tumbling over each other in a frenzied effort to avoid the stern reprisal they had so ruthlessly invited.

“A whiff of grape shot!” said Saunders. “A little firmness, a little sternness even, and a deal of trouble is saved. Another volley in the air, half a dozen executions, and a few sharp sentences of imprisonment, and a desperate situation will give way to normal tranquillity.”

“I believe you are right,” sighed the King.

“I don’t,” said Meyer; and as he spoke the crowd came back again, surging and rebellious, shouting with rage and shame and furious determination.

“See! a woman is leading them on!” cried the young officer of the Guides.

“So I perceive,” said Meyer, turning to Trafford, who stood next him. “It is the young lady whose arrest I strove to bring about this afternoon in the Strafeburg. It would perhaps have been better for her if my purpose had been fulfilled.”

Trafford drew in his breath and grasped the hand-rail of the iron balcony with a vise-like grip.

“They won’t fire on her!” he said in a choked voice.

“I think so,” said Meyer smoothly. “A rescue is certainly being attempted.

For a moment it seemed that the torrent of frenzied humanity would bear down and engulf the thin ranks of soldiery; but once again the rear rank swung their horses round, once again there was a precise ripple of small arms, and once again there was the spluttering crack of levelled carbines.

Trafford, white as a sheet, trembling with suppressed emotion, shut his eyes. When he opened them the compact mass of the crowd had melted into scattered groups fleeing for dear life in every direction. Only, on the trampled snow of the Königstrasse, lay a number of dark and prostrate objects, some feebly moving, some stark still. Trafford turned violently from the balcony and entered the dining-room with the intention of making an instant departure. Wild-eyed, heedless of good manners, court conventions, or everything indeed but a dominating desire to break out into the stricken thoroughfare, he dashed madly through the great room. In the doorway a hand, a cool feminine hand, checked him, and he found himself looking into the unemotional grey eyes of Mrs. Robert Saunders.

“Where are you going?” she asked firmly.

“Into the street.”

“Why?”

“Murder has been done. Someone may need succour.”

“The wounded will be looked after,” said Mrs. Saunders calmly, “and by more capable hands than yours. Your departure now without a formal leave-taking of his Majesty would produce the worst impres-

sion. As my husband's friend, your conduct would reflect on him. I must ask you to be prudent."

Trafford's eyes flamed furiously at the maddening check. His whole system was quivering with the excitement of the situation and the intense desire to find relief for tortured nerves in vigorous action. There was a strange pain, too, in his heart, a queer, stabbing sensation that he neither analysed nor understood. All he knew was that the Palace walls cramped him like a narrow cell, that he needed air,—the air of the Königstrasse. And yet nothing short of rude violence could have brushed aside the well-developed young lady who blocked his exit with such exasperating *vis inertiae*. With a really fine effort of self-control he mastered himself.

"I will be prudent," he said bitterly.

"Thank you."

"It would never do," went on Trafford ironically, "for your husband to fall out of favour with the humane King Karl. He might wake to find himself in the dungeons of the Strafeburg;" and with a polite bow he returned through the dining-room to the balcony.

"Well," he asked of Saunders, "does peace reign at Weidenbruck?"

"There seems to be trouble in the direction of the Grass-market," replied Saunders, pointing to a quarter from which distant sounds of shouting were faintly audible. Almost as he spoke, a red glare lit up the heavens with a rosy flickering glow.

“Incendiарism!” muttered old General Bilderbaum, feeling instinctively for his sword.

The King whispered something in General Meyer's ear.

The Commander-in-Chief nodded.

“I gave the order ten minutes ago, sire,” he replied. “The policy of straightforward repression shall be given a full trial.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

ON THE WARPATH

WHILE Trafford was devouring the enticing viands of the Neptunburg, and listening to the inspiriting conversation of the Frau Generalin von Bilderbaum, a certain captain in the third regiment of Guides was the prey to a whole host of mixed sentiments, divergent ideals, and other troubles of a conscientious egotist. Ulrich von Hügelweiler was sitting in his barrack quarters, smoking hard and thinking harder, and occasionally kicking the legs of the table in an excess of mental indecision.

"I am a loyalist by instinct," he murmured to himself, lighting his fourteenth cigarette. "But to whom? Loyalty is a virtue,—a grand virtue as a rule,—but loyalty to the wrong person is as immoral as worship paid to a false god." And having delivered himself of this platitudinous monologue he kicked another flake of varnish from the leg of his long-suffering table.

He recalled the post of honour that had been assigned him that morning on the slopes of Nussheim, and he longed to prove his worth by the solid arguments of a soldier's sword. And yet . . . and yet . . . it ought to have been he, not the American, who was the honoured guest at the Neptunburg, that night.

For the memory of his disappointment on the Rund-

see rankled intolerably in his retentive brain. Meyer had offered him a dirty task and had cheated him of fame and glory because he had refused to undertake it. He hated Meyer—hated him far more than he loved the King. He hated Trafford, too, for winning the King's Prize. He threw away his last cigarette-end with a gesture of annoyance, and rose impatiently to his feet. He would have liked at that moment to have faced Meyer on even terms with measured swords and stripped body; and having pinked the Jew's bosom, he would like to do the same service to the cursed American, who had come between him and his honourable ambition. But Karl had played no part, so far as he knew, in the dishonourable intrigue which had prevented him being placed first in the skating competition. Karl was a man who had proved his personal courage in the rising of 1904, and who,—despite the ugly rumours which flooded the city,—had an undoubted charm of personality. He repented of having tendered his resignation, for the manner in which that resignation had been deferred touched all that was most soldierly and honourable in his heart. And then into the troubled whirlpool of his thoughts came a vision, so calmly dominating, so unconquerably insistent, so sweetly imperious, that the dictates alike of hate and loyalty grew faint and indecisive before the splendid allure seen of his inward eye. A Princess stood before him, bright eyes looked pleadingly into his own, soft hands caressed the lappet of his coat. A breath sweeter than the spices of Araby was in his nostrils. Conscience, maybe, called one way, but something

stronger than conscience called the other. The call of the one was clear and loud; but the call of the other stirred every fibre in his sensuous being.

He sat down again in his arm-chair, and buried his face in his hands, and because his eyes were blinded by the action, the vision of Gloria's youthful beauty and smiling lips grew clearer, more tangible, more seductive. His mind harked back to the dismal moment when he was leaving the Rundsee, a defeated, discredited candidate for the blue ribbon of the skating world. The Princess had appeared to him at a moment when her bright presence had seemed especially dazzling by contrast with the black thoughts that filled his brain. She had appealed to him for assistance, had promised, or at least hinted at, the great reward that would bear him rose-crowned to the stars. That was worth much—everything perhaps—even a soldier's honour. But would his honour inevitably be sacrificed by placing his sword at the Princess's disposal? He had reasons for being dissatisfied with his present service, he argued. Karl—well, he could not bring himself to dislike Karl, but he was certainly a man of whom much ill was spoken. His Commander-in-Chief, Meyer, he knew for a scheming and unscrupulous politician rather than an honest soldier. And so, little by little, desire suborned conscience, till he persuaded himself,—as self-centred men habitually do,—that the path of pleasure was the path of duty.

The blare of a bugle broke rudely on his meditations. Rising and looking out of the window, he saw his men hurriedly mustering in the barrack-yard. A

second later his door burst open and his Colonel entered.

"Captain Hügelweiler, proceed instantly with a full company and fifty rounds of ball-cartridges to the Domkircheplatz," came the sharp command. "There is trouble outside the Strafeburg, and your orders are to restore tranquillity at all costs."

When the party at the Neptunburg broke up abruptly, as it did soon after the glare of incendiарism had flushed the sky to a threatening crimson, Trafford paid a hasty leave-taking of his Majesty, and hastened down the great staircase to the entrance hall. Here stood Saunders in close consultation with General Meyer.

"Nervy," said the former, "if I were you I should stay here. There is no necessity to go, and if you come up to my room we can watch things comfortably from my window."

"Thanks," said Trafford curtly, "I am not fond of watching things from the window."

"You really must not leave us," said the Commander-in-Chief, with exaggerated politeness.

"I'm afraid I must, though," said the American decisively, buttoning up his coat and putting on his snow boots over his evening shoes.

"We really cannot allow you to depart," persisted Meyer, walking to the hall-door and ostentatiously shooting a massive bolt.

A gleam lighted in Trafford's eye, but his response was politeness itself.

"I must insist on tearing myself away," he retorted. Saunders and Meyer exchanged glances.

"Herr Trafford," said the latter, "when I said you *must* not go, I meant to couch a command in terms of courtesy. The streets of Weidenbruck are in a dangerous state to-night, and as the person responsible for the public safety I really cannot sanction your departure from the Neptunburg."

Trafford glanced round him. On either side were funkeys in powdered wigs, knee breeches, and yellow coats. Between him and the street he desired to gain was—an elderly Jew.

"Is your command based solely on a concern for my personal safety?" he asked.

"Solely," was Meyer's sarcastic reply.

"Then I shall disregard it," said Trafford, producing his gun and flourishing it about in reckless fashion, "for I am quite capable of protecting myself, dear General, I assure you."

Meyer flinched violently as the muzzle of the deadly weapon was pointed in all directions, and most frequently at his own person. For a half-moment he hesitated; he had been playing a game of bluff, but he had not appreciated the bluffing capabilities of his opponent. He might call the guard, but he had a nerve-destroying idea that if he did so the mad American would have an accident with the revolver and shoot him through the leg. His half-moment's hesitation was fatal to his scheme for retaining Trafford in the Neptunburg. The latter brushed past him, threw back the

bolt, and with a “Good-night, Saunders, Good-night, General,” vanished into the street.

Having gained the open, Trafford’s first steps were directed hastily to the scene of the late contest between the mob and the soldiers. The roadway was strangely empty,—as though some dominant attraction had lured away all such as could walk or run,—leaving only those whom the recent fracas had robbed of their limbs’ use. It was these latter to whom Trafford paid instant and anxious attention. One by one he bent over the prostrate forms with peering eyes and a nameless dread in his heart. There were about a dozen, some dead, some dying, some merely incapacitated.

At the conclusion of his search Trafford heaved a deep sigh of relief, for they were all men, and what he had feared had not happened. Then, just as he was wondering what he could do to alleviate the sufferings of the stricken ones, he saw a party of friars, black-cloaked and hooded, approaching the scene with charitable intent. And so, leaving the task of mercy to better hands than his, he hastened in the direction from which distant sounds of shouting were audible. His ears led him towards the Cathedral Square, and as the noise of turbulence swelled louder and fiercer, and as his own sense of relief at the Princess’s escape from danger made itself felt more consciously, a strange exaltation of the spirit took him. His heart sang at the joyous prospect of a disturbance beside which the finest college row on record would seem a small and

trivial thing. He quickened his footsteps to a run, for his nerves were taut and tingling with the shrill joy of anarchy. Houses would be burnt instead of furniture, policemen would be assaulted with genuine ferocity, instead of the half-humorous roughness of his undergraduate days. The war-drum was sounding in his ears. The strange brain, that could pity human suffering with a superhuman sympathy, was kindled with the wild flames of primitive pugnacity. The strange heart, that could conceive an ethereal, passionless regard for a woman, was a fierce swirl of troubled waters.

Trafford, Nervy Trafford, the fire-brand of Caius, was on the warpath.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MUSIC AND THE MOB

WHEN Trafford reached the Cathedral Square he found a vast number of people, a considerable amount of noise, but nothing very stirring in the way of action. The military and the mob seemed to be watching one another in an equipoise of mutual distrust. The King's Dragoons,—who had escorted Father Bernhardt to the Strafeburg,—were patrolling a space before the prison-house, while the portal itself was held by a company of Guides under Captain von Hügelweiler. On one side, indeed, a body of energetic firemen were engaged in pumping exceedingly cold water on to an ignited building, but though the crowd jeered and shouted, the brass-helmets proceeded in their duty, unheeding and unmolested. An air of palpable dejection seemed to oppress the throng, as though they had tried conclusions with the military and come off second best. The situation pleased the American not at all. His own enthusiasm was at boiling-point, and it fretted his high spirit to see a promising revolution fizzling out for want of leaders and concerted action. He edged his way into the outskirts of the crowd, in the dim hope of meeting some kindred spirit, perhaps, even if fortune favoured him, of chancing across the Princess.

"Oh, for five minutes of Father Bernhardt!" murmured a mild-looking individual in spectacles, broad-

cloth, and a high felt hat. Trafford turned and regarded the gentleman who had voiced that spirited aspiration in such a tone of quiet pathos. He was a very large person, eminently respectable in appearance, and he was seated on a wooden stall intended for the display of merchandise.

"What would Father Bernhardt do?" asked Trafford.

"Do!" echoed the other. "Why he'd turn these dull logs of people into blazing firebrands in five minutes." The tone was one of regret and disappointment, slightly bitter and distinctly reproachful.

"Indeed!" said Trafford, scenting a character, and drawing him out.

"Yes," said the other in rising tones, "with a few of his red-hot sentences fresh from heaven or hell, or wherever it is he draws his inspirations, he'd light a flame that would roast Karl and all his pack of venial favourites and hungry courtesans."

Trafford smiled appreciatively. There were symptoms of a battle-light in those big, grey eyes, a certain rude force and stubborn vigour on those heavy, bovine features.

"Father Bernhardt's in the Strafeburg," said the American.

"Alas, yes," admitted the stranger in a voice of infinite sadness. "He alone held the threads of revolution in his hands. He alone possessed the magic of command, the subtle influence that turns *canaille* into heroes. Without him we are an army of sheep without a leader."

"Why not attempt a rescue?" suggested Trafford. The other made a gesture of contempt.

"Look at us," he said, with a wave of his hand. "Do we look the sort of people to pull down six-foot walls in the face of rifle bullets? We've been peppered once to-night, and we didn't like it. Then the firemen turned their hoses on us, and the cold water was worse than the hot fire. Look at my hat!"

Trafford regarded the high felt head-covering, and could not restrain a smile. Its crown was shiny and cockled, and its brim limp and dripping.

"I'm wet through," went on the stranger pathetically, "and I'm going home. I'm a doctor, and if there's not going to be a revolution, I'm not going to undermine my constitution watching these cowards do nothing."

"Nonsense!" said Trafford cheerily, "Something must and will be done. Why, my good man, I've come all the way from New York to see a revolution, and do you suppose I'm going back without seeing one?"

"You'd better make a speech," suggested the stranger sarcastically.

"That's not a bad idea," said Trafford, rubbing his chin thoughtfully, "but I think I've got a better one."

The stranger turned his glance on the American, a spark of interest in his gloomy eye.

"I heard a song the other night at the Eden Theatre," went on Trafford. "I think it was called the 'Rothlied.' Its effect on the audience was remarkable. Old men became boys, women went fighting mad,

and officers in uniforms swore death to all. *If we could get the 'Rothlied' going we'd have Father Bernhardt out of the Strafeburg in half an hour.*"

"Young man," said the stranger solemnly, "I'm not sure you're not a genius."

"Neither am I," said Trafford modestly. "Look here—can you sing?"

"I have a powerful baritone—and you?"

"Have the voice of a crow," said Trafford. "Also I don't know the words, and I'm not very sure of the tune."

The other repeated a few lines in Trafford's ear and hummed a few bars of the melody.

"That's all right," said Trafford. "Now then, as loud as you can. One—two—three—

"Tremble tyrants, base and callous,
Tremble at the people's cry,
See the flaming star of freedom
Rise blood-red in the sky."

In a trice the song was taken up by those nearest the two agitators, and in an incredibly short time the whole square was resounding with the swinging chorus of the inflammatory melody. The thing succeeded beyond all expectation. A new temper seemed to come over the entire throng. Wet clothes were forgotten in an access of revolutionary ardour. Men who had seen red wounds and staring death forgot the chill remembrance in the burning music of the "Rothlied." Louder and louder it swelled, fiercer grew the gesticulations of the fermenting mob. The whole mass swayed and surged with the leaven of revived fanaticism.

"We've got something to work on now," said Trafford gleefully. "Give me a pick-a-back, Herr Doctor, and I'll make a speech."

The doctor bent his massive back, and Trafford climbed up on to the broad shoulders.

"Into the thick of them, good doctor horse!" he cried, and the doctor struggled on manfully under his burden,—albeit he lost his high felt hat in the press, and the cold wind chilled the perspiration on his benevolent brow. And Trafford addressed the populace with fervid words and execrable grammar, and for some inexplicable reason his assurance and manifest energy won him a ready hearing and savage applause.

"Form barricades!" he shouted at the conclusion of his wild address.

"Why?" whispered the doctor.

"Don't you know that there is no such thing as a revolution without barricades," replied the American, "they are a necessary part of the game. Form barricades, my brothers!" he repeated in louder tones.

"With what?" demanded one.

"With snow, son of a crossing-sweeper!" replied Trafford. "Work hard, brothers, and form a rampart breast high, and hold it against all comers."

The tone of command and his imposing position on the big doctor's shoulders, won their way. The doctor, too, was recognised as a prominent burgher of "advanced" tendencies, and the crowd set to work with the utmost energy and determination.

"What on earth are you doing?" asked a soft voice by his side.

Looking down he perceived the Princess Gloria. The girl was evidently under the stress of great excitement; her eyes were unnaturally bright and her bosom was heaving tumultuously under her coat of sables. But when her eyes met Trafford's she laughed; it would not have been the Princess Gloria had she not done so.

"What on earth are you doing on Doctor Matti's shoulders?" she repeated.

"Telling the people to make snow-men for the Dragoons to charge against," he replied.

"But that won't stop them," she objected.

"Of course it won't," he agreed, "but it keeps these fellows warm and busy. The essence of a revolution is to keep things moving. Inaction is the foe to insurrection."

"You talk like a paid agitator," she said, still smiling.

"I am. The highest-paid agitator that ever was. Have you forgotten the agreed price?"

"It will never be earned," said the Princess in a low voice. "Our plans are ruined. Father Bernhardt has been taken, and without him our organisation crumbles to pieces."

"Nil desperandum Tencro duce et auspice Tencro," quoted Trafford softly. "Substitute Trafford for Tencro, and hope is unvanquished."

"You are going to lead us?" asked the Princess, with a note of expectant confidence that ministered strangely to Trafford's pride.

"Certainly," he replied, "but we want a little more enthusiasm."

"But the people are frantic," objected the doctor. "I was referring to the soldiers," explained Trafford drily. "They lack enthusiasm for the popular cause."

"They are our enemies," said the Princess bitterly; "they have fired on us several times to-night."

"They are Grimlanders," retorted Trafford, "and they only want a slight excuse to forget discipline, and remember their national characteristics."

"I think we shall do well to trust the gentleman on my shoulders," advised Doctor Matti. "It was he who set the 'Rothlied' going, and put fresh courage into the hearts of the people. I believe he possesses a most magnetic personality."

"So do I," agreed the Princess heartily. "Ten minutes ago all was despondency and depression. From the time the prison doors were shut on Father Bernhardt all energy and enthusiasm seemed to die. No one appeared to know me. I could not make myself heard. I was lost in a mob of my own partisans. Now the whole throng is in motion. Pressure is put on the soldiers at every point. If this gentleman were to lead a charge all might be won."

Trafford laughed recklessly. The situation was mending with extraordinary rapidity. There was talk now of charges, instead of returning home, and the touching confidence of the Princess in his generalship put the coping stone on his exhilaration.

"Will you do exactly what I tell you?" he asked of the Princess.

"Absolutely," was the sweet reply.

"If the people don't recognise you as the Princess," he went on, "they must recognise you as the Schöne Fräulein Schmitt, of the Eden Theatre. From my point of vantage on this good gentleman's shoulders I see a sleigh not far from us, with a couple of horses, blocked in the crowd. Let us annex it in the name of beautiful Miss Smith."

At Trafford's command the doctor bore him through the surging, singing press towards the sleigh, the Princess following closely in their wake. It was a public vehicle of the cab type, and the driver stood at the horse's head, wondering resignedly when it would be possible to get out of his present *impasse*.

"Hi! coachman," sung out Trafford; "are you engaged?"

"Engaged! Excellency. I've been here three hours in the midst of these excited gentlemen, and I daren't move, for the temper of the people is none too pleasant to risk an accident."

"That's all right," said Trafford. "I'll charter your cab for the evening. Here's a twenty krone piece." So saying, Trafford leaped on the box-seat and bade Doctor Matti and the Princess enter the vehicle. With a crack of the whip, and a cry of "Make way there for the beautiful Fräulein Schmitt! Way for the singer of the 'Rothlied!'" he forced a slow and dangerous progress through the close-packed multitude. His objective was the neck of the Königstrasse, and somehow he arrived there without injuring life or limb. Between the cordon of infantry and the mob was an open space, up and down which a number of officers

walked with drawn swords and a palpable air of nervousness. The crowd was still singing the incendiary song, and the rank and file of the soldiers looked obviously bored with their duties, and longing to join in the chorus. Trafford drew up on the verge of the open space.

“Silence, my friends!” he called out to the crowd, rising to his feet on the box. “Silence for the *Schöne Fräulein Schmitt*, of the Eden Theatre!”

The Princess rose at his gesture of command. Her face was pale, and her twitching hands betokened intense nervousness, but there was a twinkle in her eye that showed that she added humour to the proverbial courage of her race. And in the intense silence of appreciation her sweet young soprano rang out free and fresh into the cold night air. Confidence came to her with each additional line of the song. The occasion,—which had begun by almost overwhelming her,—served now but to stimulate her highest powers. She put fire into her melody; she added gestures appropriate and warlike; she became not merely a singer, but Bellona herself, young and beautiful and ardent.

“Hurrah for the beautiful Fräulein! Hurrah for freedom!” shouted the crowd.

“The chorus, now!” yelled Trafford, with a special appeal to the soldiers; and, as he had anticipated, the chorus was sung, not by the mob alone, but by the triple line of infantry holding the neck of the Königstrasse. Harsh commands were given by frantic officers, but to no avail. The music had got into the men’s blood, and curses and entreaties, blows even,

failed signally to check the tide of revolutionary song.

“Well sung, brothers!” cried out Trafford as the song died down. “Three cheers for the beautiful Fräulein Schmitt!”

Three cheers were given by all, and with especial heartiness by the soldiers.

“Now, listen to what I’m going to say,” went on Trafford in stentorian tones. “The lady who just sang that song isn’t the beautiful Fräulein Schmitt, for there is no such person. The beautiful Fräulein Schmitt is the most noble and high-born Princess Gloria von Schattenberg, whom you are going to set on the throne of Grimland. Behold your Queen who is to be!”

At these words a mighty shout rent the air. No one seemed to doubt the truth of the startling *dénouement*; the crowd was drunk with its own singing, drunk with the lust of anarchy, its reasoning faculties dulled in a wild orgy of rebellion. The form and features of the Princess Gloria were practically unknown in Weidenbruck, but all the Grimlander’s innate love of change had grouped itself beneath the ægis of her name. For years she had been the official figure-head of the revolutionary party. Wild legends and poetic fantasies had been woven round her little-known existence. And now the present dramatic disclosure of her personality,—identified as it was with that of the popular Fräulein Schmitt, the singer of the all-pervading “Rothlied,”—kindled an enthusiasm no bonds could restrain.

“Long live the noble and high-born Princess!”

shouted Trafford, but his voice was drowned in the wild confusion of cries that shook the air like thunder. The soldiers broke their ranks and mingled with the crowd; several of the officers joined the swelling stream of insurrection; a few,—neither wholly false nor wholly brave,—slunk off down the Königstrasse, pursued by the jeers of their late subordinates.

Trafford, with the instincts of a true leader, struck hard while the iron glowed.

“To the Strafeburg!” he cried.

“To the Strafeburg!” shouted a hundred responsive voices.

Trafford cracked his whip, and set his horse in motion towards the prison house.

“To the Strafeburg! Make way there! way for the Queen!” he cried. And in a seething unison of struggling limbs and straining throats, the vast crowd of men and women, soldiers and civilians, pressed irresistibly towards the doomed prison house.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE TEMPTATION OF ULRICH

VON HÜGELWEILER,—standing with his paltry hundred men facing the wild throng,—wondered what this new press and surge of human billows might portend. So far he had done his duty loyally and well: hour after hour he had stood at his post watching the varying temper of the people, as it seethed and cooled and then rose suddenly again to more than boiling heat. Nor did this fresh mood of aggression affright him with its terrifying unanimity and savage outburst of song. He was essentially a man of temperament. Egotist, in the sense that he valued his own happiness and well-being above all things, he was no coward. Egotists, in fact, seldom are, for their swollen self-esteem cannot lightly suffer so humiliating a burden as a suspicion of timidity. Moreover, he was young and virile, a scion of a warlike family, and the vibrant roar of a thousand voices served but to string his nerves to the heroic pitch. Had he foreseen the post that was to be assigned him that evening his dark cheek might have blanched at the prospect, and his spirit sickened before the appalling ferocity of the hungering mob. But the actual situation,—serious beyond all expectation,—found him not merely calm and determined, but actually desirous of bringing matters to the touch.

Perhaps the “Rothlied’s” wild measure had mounted

his brain and made him drunk with its pulsing beat, for he almost wished that these wild men and women who surged towards him so threateningly were his comrades in some task of note or honour. Yet, if they were his foes, he prayed that they would attack at once and give swift scope to his itching sword-arm. So, blade in hand, with bright eye and scornful lip,—no mean figure of a soldier in his grey-blue surcoat,—he stood at the head of his company before the portals of the Strafeburg.

But his astonishment was great when, with a swaying of the mob and a louder note of acclaim, the sleigh driven by Trafford emerged into the open space held by the patrolling Dragoons. He failed for the moment to recognise in the driver his late rival of the Rundsee, but his eye quickly detected the fur-enveloped figure of the Princess on the back seat. For a moment his heart stood still, for the Dragoons were galloping up from the right-hand corner of the building, and he feared that in the shock of the encounter violence or mischance might lay low the fair creature whom he loved more than his honour or his King. But the temper of the people was not to let their new-found heroine be seized or trampled on before their eyes, and a section of the mob, stiffened by the mutinied soldiers, thrust a stout wedge between the Princess and the oncoming cavalry.

Trafford rose to his feet on the summit of the box. Quicker of perception than Von Hügelweiler, he recognised the latter in an instant.

“Good-evening, Herr Captain!” he called out

genially ; “ kindly open the door of the Strafeburg,— your Queen desires it.”

Von Hügelweiler’s eyes wore a daze of wonderment. What on earth was the American doing on the box of the Princess’s sleigh?

“ Give your men the order to let us pass,” went on Trafford with masterful good humour ; “ I want to avoid bloodshed ! The people mean entering the Strafeburg ; they mean rescuing Father Bernhardt ! ”

Von Hügelweiler laughed scornfully, a rising anger in his heart. How dared this mad foreigner address him in such tones of easy condescension, as if he were a dog to be coaxed aside from a door ! What was he doing championing the Princess—*his* Princess ?

“ You are a very confident fellow, Herr Trafford ! ” he called back ; “ but if you mean forcing this doorway you must do it by your own valour. You have no favourable umpire here, as on the Rundsee.”

The allusion passed Trafford by. Nor did he perceive that he was face to face with an angry and excited man.

“ Don’t waste time, Captain ! ” he cried. “ You see these soldiers here fraternising with the crowd ? Ten minutes ago they were holding the Königstrasse for Karl. Do you see those Dragoons over there ? Are they forcing a bloody way through the throng to effect our capture ? No ; the troopers are laughing with the crowd ; some of them are singing the ‘ Rothlied ’ ; even the officers are resigning themselves to the inevitable, and cheering for the Princess.”

This was anything but a true description of the real

state of affairs, as Trafford could see from his exalted position on the box. To Von Hügelweiler, however,—who could see nothing but a confused mass,—it sounded probable enough. In reality, a pretty stern struggle was going on, the officer commanding the Dragoons desiring above all things to annex the person of the Princess, while at the same time unwilling to embitter the fury of the people by further slaughter. No firearms were used, but the troopers were employing the flats of their swords to considerable purpose, and despite the courage of the people and the support of the mutineers, the protecting wedge between the Princess and the cavalry was being appreciably diminished. Trafford saw that success must come quickly or not at all.

"Let us pass, Captain," he went on. "There's been enough bloodshed to-night. I don't want to hurt a good sportsman like yourself."

But Captain Von Hügelweiler was in no mood to yield to an implied threat.

"To the devil with your kindness!" he cried wildly, brandishing his sword with a defiant gesture. "Drop words and come to hand-grips, *schweinhund* of an American!"

These words would doubtless have had their effect on the excitable Trafford had not the Princess grasped the vital danger of the moment. In a twinkling she had risen to her feet and thrown out her arms appealingly.

"Ulrich," she implored, "I want your help. The whole city is on my side; will you alone stand between

me and my ambition? Help me now, and I can give you rewards beside which the King's Prize you failed to win yesterday will seem a trivial and empty honour."

"I want no bribes," said the Captain between his teeth.

"I will make you captain of my body-guard," pursued the Princess in tones of soft entreaty. "It will be your sacred duty to guard my person day and night. Ulrich, for the sake of the old days at Weissheim, will you let me pass?"

An anarchy of tangled emotions rioted through the Captain's brain. He half-closed his eyes, and his whole form tottered like that of a drunken man.

"Ulrich!" breathed the Princess.

There was a moment's silence, a life-time of twenty seconds, during which the blood left the Captain's face and crowded his bursting heart. Then came the jangling crash of steel on stone. Captain Ulrich von Hügelweiler had thrown his sword on to the steps of the prison-house.

"Soldiers, present arms!" he called out in a hoarse voice; and between the ranks of saluting infantry the Princess and her followers passed into the Strafeburg.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

KING AND CANAILLE

“WHERE is George Trafford?” asked Mrs. Saunders of her husband.

It was just on ten o’clock, ten minutes, in fact, after Trafford had bluffed an exit from the Neptunburg; and Mrs. Saunders was sitting in the Rubens room in the company of Frau von Bilderbaum. To retire to bed in the present unsettled state of affairs was unthinkable, and the two women,—so unlike in temperament and feature, yet linked by the subtle bond of wifehood,—sat, to their mutual comfort, in the great state-room opening on to the palace courtyard. Disturbances were common things at Weidenbruck, but to-night there was an extra pressure in the atmosphere. The air was full of fever and unrest, pregnant with some issue of decisive import. A dull anxiety was written on the women’s faces; their eyes seemed watching, their ears expectantly listening for something. The tension was almost unbearable in its strained silence, and Mrs. Saunders hailed her husband’s advent with a sigh of relief.

“Where is George Trafford?” she asked again.

“I don’t know,” replied Saunders, “but he’s not where I intended him to be—locked in my dressing-room with a brandy and soda, and a pack of cards to play patience with.”

Saunders had entered from the courtyard, though

the chamber possessed two other doors connecting it with the corridors of the Neptunburg. The room itself was of considerable size, rich in works of art, mellow with abundant candle-light and the numerous gold frames that housed some choice products of the old Flemish painters. The fireplace,—by which the two ladies were seated,—was a much carven affair of pale-rose marble with blue-purple markings. The tiles round the huge grate were of old Persian manufacture, holding the rich blue and green tints that modern chemistry strives so unsuccessfully to approximate. In one corner of the room stood a tall, ornate clock, presented to a predecessor of Karl's by the Pompadour: on the mantelpiece reposed a pair of porphyry vases, the gift of the late Czar.

Frau von Bilderbaum was smoking a cigarette in enormous puffs, her wide nostrils dilating spasmodically with the emotion that filled her capacious frame.

"Then you have no idea where this wretched American is?" she demanded in thick tones of pent wrathfulness.

"Not the faintest," replied Saunders. "If I hazarded a guess, I should say in the Strafebburg."

"A prisoner?" questioned Mrs. Saunders quickly. "I hope so."

"I hope so, too," said Saunders, "but I have my doubts; I wish I had never induced the fellow to come to Grimland—he is too much in his element. He is just the sort of lunatic to appeal to the average Weidenbrucker. But talking of lunatics, thank goodness Father Bernhardt is safe under lock and key at last!"

"How do you know?" asked Frau von Bilderbaum.

"A telephone message has just come through from the police-station; it is good news. With that devil-riden priest at large, and Nervy Trafford fooling about, it's tough work keeping a sane Government on its legs."

"I thought you were not going to let Mr. Trafford leave the Palace?" interjected Mrs. Saunders.

"That was certainly our intention," admitted Saunders, "but he argued otherwise, his argument taking the practical form of a six-chambered revolver, and—well——"

"He threatened you?" interrupted Mrs. Saunders indignantly.

"Not me, perhaps; but Meyer certainly by implication. Anyway, we let him go to his fate. He will quite probably be shot heading a charge against the military. In anything of a disturbance he sees red, and his thinking powers come automatically to a standstill."

"I hate this Mr. Trafford!" exclaimed Frau von Bilderbaum in harsh, guttural tones, and puffing furiously at her cigarette. "Why does not he stay in his own country and wreck that? I hate him!"

"I don't," said Mrs. Saunders quietly; "I rather like him. But I wish my husband had knocked him on the head rather than let him leave the Neptunburg."

At this point the door opened and the King entered, accompanied by General von Bilderbaum. The General's face was scarlet, contrasting effectively with his snowy hair and moustache and the immaculate white-

ness of his uniform. His manner,—like that of his wife,—was strongly agitated, and it was evident that the civic tumult had roused his fighting spirit to a point dangerously near apoplexy. The King, in contrast, looked grey and sad, but his face brightened a little as the ladies rose at his entrance.

“Things seem to be quieting down a little in the Domkircheplatz,” he said. “I have been talking to my Prefect Kummer on the telephone, and he thinks the square will be empty in half an hour.”

“I am glad,” said Mrs. Saunders simply.

“I am very glad,” echoed Saunders; “I feel some responsibility in the matter. It was I who induced Trafford to come to Weidenbruck. The fellow was in trouble, and I wanted to show him sport; but I did not want him to find his sport at the expense of my host.”

Karl laid a kindly hand on Saunders’ shoulder.

“My very dear friend,” he said, “this morning you saved my life. About this time three years ago you saved it under even more dramatic circumstances and at even greater personal risk. There is no room for apologies from you to me.” A silence followed his Majesty’s words. Then the King went on: “Besides, this mad American friend of yours is a very small part of my troubles. Were my subjects loyal men and true, his capacity for harm would be *nil*; as it is, I think we over-rate it. With Father Bernhardt in the Strafeburg we can sleep safe and sound in our beds tonight.” His Majesty touched the electric bell. “Let us drink death to anarchy and revolution,” he went on,

as the major-domo Bomcke appeared. "Bomcke, brandy and cigarettes, if you please."

In a trice the whiskered and stately Bomcke produced the necessary stimulants from a Buhl cupboard, and set the shining glass and silver on the great circular table of Florentine inlay.

The men filled their glasses in turn.

"Death to anarchy, sire!" cried General von Bildebaum; "and may my sword help to deal its death-blow."

"Death to traitors, cowards, and—" began Saunders, but his speech was checked by the appearance on the scene of General Meyer.

"What news?" demanded his Majesty.

"Good and bad, sire," replied the Commander-in-Chief.

"The good first, please," said Karl.

"The Red Hussars have refused to quit their barracks."

The King's face fell.

"You call that good news?" he said after a pause.

"Distinctly," returned Meyer. "Had they turned out they would undoubtedly have sided with the rioters. I know their admirable Colonel, and the *état d'âme* of his command."

The King put his brandy and soda down untasted on the table.

"Now for the bad news," he said firmly.

"They are singing the 'Rothlied' in front of the Strafeburg, sire," was the Commander-in-Chief's reply.

"Is that all?" demanded his Majesty.

Meyer shrugged his shoulders.

"Your Majesty's subjects are very musical folk," he said drily, "and the 'Rothlied' is a very remarkable melody. I heard it the other day, and it had almost the effect of making me feel heroic. That speaks volumes for its potency."

In the silence which followed these words was heard the distant tinkling of the telephone bell. The King made as though to move towards the door, but changed his mind and remained where he was, signalling to Bomcke to take the call. There were three endless minutes during which no one spoke; on the faces of all might be read in contracted brow and half-open mouth the sharp dominating expectancy that possessed them, the sickening fear of ill-tidings, and the struggling hope of good. Then the major-domo reappeared, and the struggling hope was extinguished. Bomcke's face, always waxen, was deathly pale, and his suave, smug pomposity had given way to a palsy of agitation.

"Well?" demanded the King; but no answering speech issued from Bomcke's twitching lips.

"Speak, man!" interjected General von Bilderbaum wrathfully, but the major-domo merely bowed unctuously and fumbled stupidly with his white hands.

"What is it, Bomcke?" asked the King, more kindly.

"The—Strafeburg—" said the steward, forming his words with infinite difficulty.

"Go on," said Meyer, almost as bloodless as the invertebrate major-domo.

"The Strafeburg," repeated Bomcke stupidly.

"Yes, yes, yes!" screamed Frau von Bilderbaum,

losing all patience. "And what about the Strafeburg?"

The question was never answered; perhaps it never needed an answer, for the stern faces of the King and his Generals showed that they knew the worst. But there was another reason for postponing their interrogations. A distant sound of many voices was audible to the inmates of the Rubens room. It was a sound similar to that which had interrupted the dinner-party at the Neptunburg that evening, a snarling roar of malice and insensate fury. Louder it swelled with amazing rapidity,—and there was a note of reckless triumph in its depths that had something very terrible and disconcerting in it.

"Have I your Majesty's permission?" demanded General von Bilderbaum, drawing his sword and holding it in stiff salute.

"Where is the guard?" asked Karl.

"In the courtyard, sire," replied Meyer, "Captain Traun-Nelidoff is in command."

"Have I your Majesty's permission to take over that command?" persisted Von Bilderbaum.

For a moment the King stood motionless in deep thought.

"I will usurp that position myself," he said at length, going to the door leading on to the courtyard and flinging it open. The roar of the shrieking rabble burst in through the doorway in waves of terrifying sound.

Meyer poured himself out a half-tumblerful of neat brandy, thought better of it, and handed it to the col-

lapsing Bomcke. When he looked up the King had disappeared into the courtyard, with General von Bilderbaum and Saunders in his wake. With a strange grimace and a muttered "Folly!" he followed, too, with leaden steps. For a moment Mrs. Saunders and Frau von Bilderbaum were left alone. Their eyes met, and then their hands. Both asked a silent question, and both returned a silent answer. Then, throwing some loose wraps around their shoulders, they also went out to face the grim menace of the night.

In the courtyard of the Neptunburg a company of soldiers was drawn up before the fountain and leaden statue of the sea-god. On three sides were stone façades of piedmented windows and classic pilasters. On the fourth side, facing the Königstrasse, were wrought-iron gates between high piers of carved masonry, bearing electric arc lamps. Overhead the stars burned clear in the cold heaven; underfoot was the trampled carpet of semestral snow.

"Shall we fire on the mob, sire?" demanded Traun-Nelidoff, a tall, lean officer, whose eyes shone as brightly as his drawn sword.

Karl shook his head. The rabble were pressed against the iron railings in a frenzy of destructive lust. Hands were thrust graspingly between the bars, curses and jeers issued unceasingly from grinning lips; the analogy to terriers outside a rat-trap was irresistible. But Karl was taking stock of the *personnel* of his enemies. There were low ruffians in abundance, "hooligans," "apaches," "larrikins" (as they are called in different cities), "nightwolves," as they were

called in Weidenbruck—men with the narrow, receding foreheads that can only house vile thoughts, the ugly, misshapen mouths that can only utter base words, the long, loose arms that are more fitted for garotting than honest work. Yet there were others: men with hot eyes, indeed, and upraised voices, but clothed in decent garments, burghers of some standing in the Stadt, men with a stake in the country who would not welcome anarchy for its own wild sake. There were soldiers, too, in the throng, and here and there a smart uniform that bespoke an officer of the line. Karl watched, and as he watched the lines deepened on his grey face.

"Traun-Nelidoff," he shouted hoarsely, "open the gates!"

"We are to charge, sire?" came the breathless inquiry.

"No. These are my people; I wish to speak with them."

Traun-Nelidoff protested with a glance, but Karl's face was set like stone.

With slow steps the Captain of the Guard advanced to the palace gates. He laid his hand on the huge key, but it would not budge. He put the point of his sword into the iron ring and used it as a lever, and with a raucous clang the bolt shot back. There was no need to do more. In a twinkling the twin gates were hurled open by the dense pressure of the closely-packed mob, and in a few seconds the stately courtyard was a mass of revolutionaries.

The King and his late companions of the Rubensaal were separated from the Guard by the rush of incomers,

but there was no attack made upon their person. For a moment even there was silence; perhaps the unexpectedness of the situation gave the rebels pause; perhaps the dignity of the royal presence shamed their violence. And, in that silence, Karl stepped forward as if to speak, but just at that moment there was a sudden cry of—

“Way there! way for the Queen Gloria!” and with a crack of a whip a sleigh drove through the open gates into the courtyard. The driver was George Trafford! In the body of the car sat the Princess Gloria, pale and softly weeping, but struggling bravely with her tears. On one side of her was Doctor Matti, and on the other Father Bernhardt. But there was something else in the sleigh, something that was neither man nor woman, and yet had the lineaments of a human being. The Iron Maiden had been taken from the captured Strafeburg, and was being borne in triumph to the home of its owner. Ever since the death of the late Archbishop,—and the spreading of the vile legend which ascribed his sudden demise to the embrace of the celebrated *Eisenmädchen*,—the thing had stood as the symbol of the cruelty and despotism of the twenty-second Karl. So when the tide of revolution had swept into the ancient prison-house, rude hands had plucked the maiden from her home, and set her on the sleigh with the leaders of their emancipation.

The sleigh pulled up before the King.

“I want to avoid bloodshed,” began Trafford in English, but even as he spoke the mob re-found its old temper. Cries and curses ruined all prospect of a par-

ley ; desperate men and wild women pressed in on the royal party, and clutching hands were thrust even in the King's face. This was too much for General von Bilderbaum. His hand, which had been itching on his sword hilt, flashed the weapon from its sheath and struck down a sallow ruffian who had impinged too recklessly on the King's person. In an instant rough hands were laid on the stout old soldier, and the General's honourable career looked to be near its certain termination. But there was one near him as devoted to the General as the General was to his Sovereign. With the quickness of thought Frau von Bilderbaum hurled her ample person between her husband and his assailants. A plump hand was swung, there was a sounding smack of flesh meeting flesh, and a "night wolf" was lying prostrate and smarting in the snow. The sight of the Amazonian fury standing with dilated nostrils and fiery glance before her lord and master touched the humour of the crowd.

"Well struck, housewife!" shouted one; and for a moment a burst of laughter took the place of fierce cries and yells of derision. But while the incident was taking place, Trafford had descended from his box-seat and engaged in conversation with Saunders. The latter listened with a grave face, looked doubtful, and ultimately nodded. Then, as Trafford remounted to his seat, Saunders in turn whispered earnestly in the King's ear. And almost at once,—so quick are the moods of mobs,—the comic scene was forgotten and the lust of vengeance came uppermost again in the minds of the insurgents.

"Death to the tyrants!" shouted some. "Death to Karl! Away with oppressors of the people's liberty!"

It was a moment of crisis. Things had reached a head, and in a minute unless something was done there would be a hideous massacre.

With upraised hands Karl plunged boldly forward and addressed the crowd. He spoke, but no word was audible. A deafening chorus of jeers and curses stifled his utterance. Pale, leonine, unflinching, he faced the rabid throng. Then suddenly Trafford and Father Bernhardt descended from the sleigh. Between them, and with the help of Doctor Matti, they dragged the Iron Maiden out on to the snow of the courtyard. The Princess bent forward in an agony of entreaty, but the ex-priest silenced her with a word. Then quick as thought Trafford seized the isolated monarch, pushed him inside the *Eisenmädchen*, and with an apparently great effort shut the doors slowly on his victim. The horror took the crowd by surprise. They had come lustng for blood but not for torture. A low intake of the breath made simultaneously by a hundred throats gave a vast sibilant sound. Men looked at each other in frozen horror. A woman burst into high hysterical laughter. Then with a sudden impulse born of guilty remorse, the huge concourse began to slink away from the scene. At first by twos and threes, then by tens and twenties, then in one universal struggling rush. In a few minutes the only occupants of the courtyard were the royal party, the guard—and the Iron Maiden.

"Close the gates, please, Traun-Nelidoff," ordered Saunders.

Mechanically the officer did as he was bid. General Meyer was looking at his boots with a vacant stare. Beads of perspiration were standing on his brow. Von Bilderbaum was rubbing snow in an absent-minded way on his wife's face, the lady having swooned in his arms.

"You let him do it—you let him do it," muttered Mrs. Saunders reproachfully to her husband.

"Yes, I let him do it," he answered. "It was Trafford's own idea, and shows how near genius lies to madness. You see, there were no spikes in the Iron Maiden; they were all in Trafford's overcoat pocket."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

"CAPTAIN" TRAFFORD

IN his room in the Hôtel Concordia, Nervy Trafford was standing before a long looking-glass, surveying his mirrored image with an ever-recurring smile. Two days had passed since the Strafebburg had fallen, two busy days in the nation's history, and this particular morning found him arrayed in the uniform of a Grim-land Staff-Captain.

The dark green tunic with its fur trimming and black braiding suited his face and figure admirably. He twirled his moustaches, and disengaged his sword from between his legs, and his smile broadened to a laugh.

"I only need a false nose," he said to himself, "and I should make a splendid impersonator of Offenbachian opera." And, drawing his sword, he sang with great spirit and much expression, that inimitable air: "Voici le sabre de mon pere—voici le sabre de-e mon pere."

A knock at the door checked his vibrato.

"*Herein!*" he called.

A boy in a tight brown uniform, adorned with the usual unnecessary buttons, entered.

"A note, Excellency."

Trafford took the missive, which bore the royal seal. It read as follows:

“Neptunburg.

“*My Good Friend,*

“*The procession leaves here at mid-day, when you must be in close attendance on the Royal Person. Lunch at 2 p. m. After lunch, an informal Council in the Throne room. After the Council, make your way to the private apartments. I will give orders for you to be admitted.*

Yours very bewildered,

G. v. S., I mean G. R.”

Trafford read, and at the conclusion he whistled. What did it mean, what could it mean but one thing? The situation presented itself as a syllogism of amazing but irrefutable argument. The Princess was going to be crowned. It was undeniable that he had contributed largely to that consummation. The corollary was a ceremony of marriage between himself and the newly-elected sovereign. No wonder the smile gave place to a frown of deep bewilderment. No wonder he passed his fingers repeatedly through his thick and stubborn hair. The compact that was now disturbing his peace of mind had been entered into with the lightest of light hearts. The night he had first met the Princess he had been a soldier of fortune primed with good wine and the spirit of reckless adventure. But since then things had progressed with him, as with the state of Grimland, rapidly.

The condition of spiritual stagnation in which he had visited Grimland was being slowly but surely overcome by fresh interests and rousing incidents. Three

days ago it would have seemed a capital jest to go through the ceremony of marriage with an exceptionally beautiful girl with a kingdom for her dowry. Now it seemed like a piece of wanton blasphemy in the worst possible taste.

He put a cigarette between his lips, and took a match from a heavy glass bowl that did duty as match-box. He struck it on the ribbed side of the bowl, but the match burned his fingers before even it made acquaintance with the tobacco.

Supposing he went through this ceremony, he reasoned, and supposing in this topsy-turvy country the ceremony was approved and ratified by the State—what then? A queer thrill ran through him at the supposition, but he shook his head fiercely. The more he saw of the Princess the more he liked her, and the more he realised the difference between liking and loving. There were strange ideals still lurking in the recesses of his unconventional brain, and to wed a woman for any less reason than a deep spiritual devotion seemed to him a prostitution of God's choicest gifts. And he could not honestly call his regard for the high-couraged little Schattenberg a deep spiritual devotion. It was clean and healthy as the north wind, and every whit as wholesome and refreshing—but was it even approximately like the sentiment he had entertained for the pedestalled Angela Knox?

He made a second attempt to light his cigarette, and this time with success. He blew out a great puff of blue smoke and gazed earnestly into its unravelling depths. And for a prolonged minute of self-hypnotism

he was dematerialised out of the picturesque uniform of a Grimland officer, and was standing, smug and frock-coated, in a New York drawing-room. Before him was a very tall woman with a wonderfully correct profile and an abundance of honey-coloured hair. This was the creature to whom he had offered the worship of his life, the woman whose refusal of his suit had thrust him to the very brink of the grim precipice of which no man knoweth the bottom. He gazed and gazed and even admired—but he was unmoved. Slowly the smoke faded, and the dream in the smoke, and he laughed aloud.

Self-analysis is a difficult game for all, and to one of his complex temperament an altogether hopeless proceeding. And so, as if to blow the crowded thoughts from his brain, he stepped to his high window overlooking the city, and flung open the casement. The bells of the cathedral were pealing joyous music into the winter air. The city was *en fête*. The flag of Grimland was flying from all public and semi-public buildings.

Shops, private houses, and hotels were gay with bunting and festoons of artificial flowers. And the sun,—as if to honour the new dynasty with its more than royal majesty,—was gilding men’s handiwork till tinsel became silver and gold, and every banner a brave thing of joy and colour and heartfelt holiday.

Within two days of the supposed death of Karl the new dynasty was to be inaugurated with all the pomp that State and Church could lend the occasion.

Things had progressed, not at a run, but at a gallop.

And for this Father Bernhardt was responsible. The man was a wonder. He may have been mad, but if so his madness was the distortion of a splendid brain, not the aberration of a weak one. He had gathered the reins of government into his own hands with the skill and confidence of a born ruler. There was no anarchy, no confusion, no hiatus in the city's ordering. Men were conciliated whom it was wise to conciliate. Others were over-awed, a few were suppressed. He seemed to know intuitively everyone's sentiments and every man's abilities. Doctor Matti was made Prefect of Police, Von Hügelweiler became Captain of the Guard. Trafford was given an official position on the staff of the Queen's army. Generally speaking, there was little redistribution of existing authorities. The army welcomed the new *régime*, believing that a change of dynasty might involve a change from the peaceful policy of the twenty-second Karl. Business men and professional men accepted it even when they did not welcome it. There was no alternative. Karl, so they believed, was dead. His son was far away at Weissheim, and was far too young a little person to rule the mad whirlwind of his country's policies. So the *fait accompli* became the thing accepted, and as the joy bells rang out their message the contagion of their silver tongues turned the hearts, even of the lukewarm, to glad allegiance to the young Queen.

"Poor little Princess," mused Trafford, as he gazed out at the sparkling panorama of white roofs and snow-crested battlements, "what an ordeal lies before you, to-day and to-morrow, and the day after to-morrow!"

It is the day after to-morrow one fears in Grimland. The sun does not always shine at Weidenbruck, and the cathedral bells are not always instruments of joy.”

Another knock at the door interrupted his reverie. This time it was Von Hügelweiler who responded to his “*herein*.”

“Good-morning,” said Trafford genially, extending a hand in greeting.

But no answering smile showed on the Captain’s stern and gloomy countenance, and instead of grasping Trafford’s hand, his own went up in a stiff salute.

Von Hügelweiler was suffering from Trafford on the brain. His natural dislike for the American, born of the latter’s triumph on the Rundsee, had been extraordinarily deepened by the events of the past few days. It was Trafford to whom all glory for the capture of the Strafeburg redounded; Trafford who had set the “Rothlied” going, suborned the soldiers, “bossed” everything and everybody as if he were a true born patriot instead of a foreign adventurer with the devil’s own luck. Why, next to Father Bernhardt this pig of an American was the most popular man in Weidenbruck! All this, in itself, was a source of considerable annoyance to the sensitive Captain of the Guides; but what touched him on the raw, was the footing on which Trafford seemed to stand with the Princess Gloria. He knew nothing of the true state of their relations, but he perceived at once an ease and understanding between them, which embittered his spirit and spoilt his whole pleasure in life. He, Von Hügelweiler, had forfeited his self-respect, risked all his prospects, his soldier’s

honour, for the sake of a half-formulated pledge, 'for the vague shadow of a promise of things unutterably sweet. Were it to be that this sacrifice had been made in vain, that this hated American was the one who had come between him and the heaven of his desire, there would be a heavy price to be paid, a full price, a reckoning in something more precious than gold and silver. And so he had come to Trafford's rooms, not with any definite idea either of eliciting information or forcing a quarrel, but because,—as has been said,—he had Trafford on the brain, and he felt it necessary to keep in touch with him.

"To what do I owe the honour of this visit?" the American went on, getting no response to his greeting.

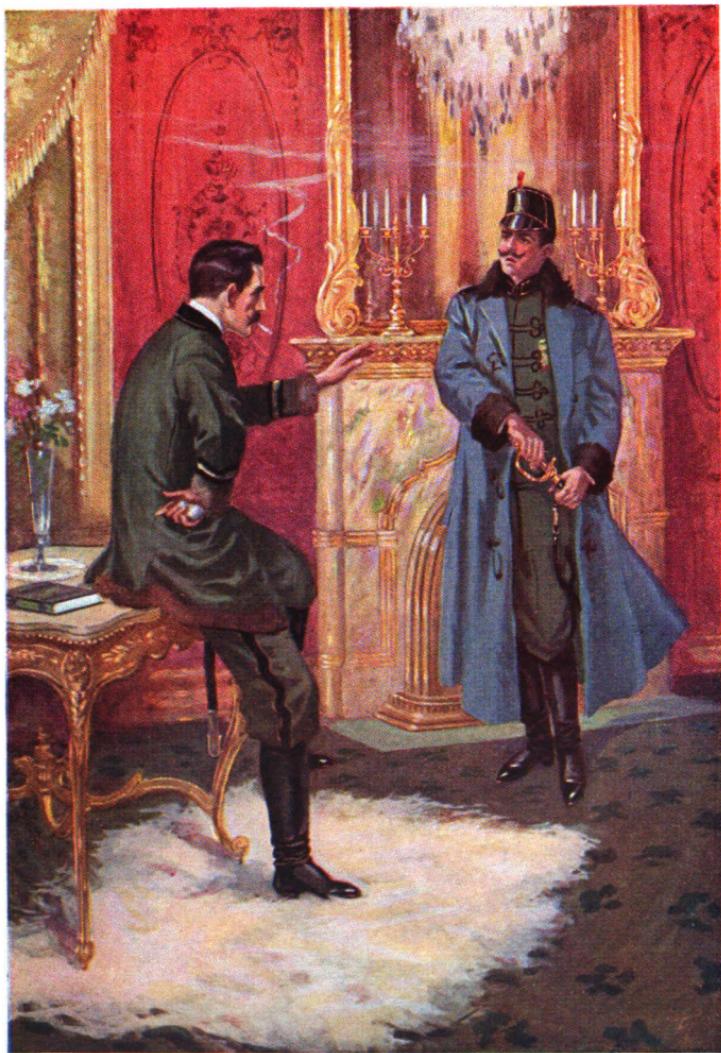
"I come with commands," said the Captain brusquely. He was mindful of the *de haut en bas* manner which Trafford had employed towards him that night before the Strafeburg, and he wished to reverse their respective positions once for all. "You have been appointed to the Staff, and I am your superior officer."

"Salaam! Sahib," said Trafford with a facetious bow.

Hügelweiler flushed, and went on in angry tones.

"My orders are that you start with the royal procession from the Neptunburg at mid-day. I, as Captain of the Guard, shall be in close attendance on the Queen. You will bring up the rear with a company of the Kurdeburg Volunteers."

Von Hügelweiler's tone was designedly over-bearing, but Trafford kept his temper marvellously well, as he sometimes could, when occasion demanded.



**"If I see so much as an inch of blade this little
hand-grenade of mine will play havoc
with your handsome features"**

“Are those your commands or the Queen’s” he asked, tossing the glass matchbox a little way into the air and catching it again. His behaviour irritated Von Hügelweiler inexpressibly.

“They are commands—that is enough for you,” he retorted crudely.

“Not nearly enough, I assure you,” responded Trafford, with exaggerated blandness. “I have her Majesty’s orders to be in close attendance on her royal person. Until I get counter-orders from an equally high source I shall perform the pleasant and honourable duty of being in the closest possible proximity to our dear Sovereign.”

Hügelweiler’s face became livid with rage.

“Show me your orders!” he demanded harshly.

“They were conveyed in a private note, otherwise I should have much pleasure, my superior officer.”

“I command you to show them to me!” cried the Captain, losing all patience; “and for heaven’s sake cease tossing that infernal matchbox!”

This was altogether too much for Trafford’s sorely-tried self-control. He had held himself in with incalculable patience up to now, but he felt that the moment had arrived for letting himself go—thoroughly.

“Von Hügelweiler,” he said in peculiarly distinct tones, “we live in stirring times. A King has just lost his throne, a number of high functionaries have been laid low, a mass of—shall I say, scum—has come to the surface. No, Captain, don’t draw your sword,” he said sternly, as the Captain flushed crimson and made a threatening movement with his sword-arm. “I

am not an unarmed man, my brave officer"—poising the substantial matchbox in his right hand, in the manner of an athlete about to put the weight—"and if I see so much as an inch of blade this little hand-grenade of mine will play havoc with your handsome features. That's better," he went on, as the other shrank back furious but cowed before the strange missile which threatened his physical attractions, "that's much better, *mon brav.* Curse and swear and vow vengeance, but don't play any monkey tricks, or the Guards will want a smarter captain to lead them in the procession to-day. And one more word before you withdraw the sunshine of your presence from the room," he continued, as the other made a movement towards the door with mingled fury and disgust on his countenance. "I have taken a hand in the game which is being played in Grimland. I have thrown in my lot with Gloria von Schattenberg, and as her officer I am prepared to obey as well as command—in reason. But I won't be bullied, Herr Captain. I'm not built that way."

"You shall answer for your insolence!" came viciously through Von Hügelweiler's white teeth.

"Maybe, but if you can get the Queen to sanction my arrest you're a cleverer man than you look, Von Hügelweiler."

A curse hissed from the Captain's lips, and he half raised his clenched fist in a gesture of intolerable passion. Then his arm dropped limp to his side and a look of suffering came into his eyes, and when he spoke, it was hoarsely and with a break in his voice.

"What is Gloria von Schattenberg to you?" he asked.

"That is the precise question I was asking myself when you came in," was the response. "To answer it I need solitude, and solitude, Captain,—as I need not point out,—is incompatible with your presence here. Captain von Hügelweiler, I have the honour of wishing you good-morning."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE FIRST COUNCIL

AT noon precisely a cannon was fired from the tower of the Strafeburg. Simultaneously the royal procession started from the Neptunburg, where the Princess Gloria had taken up her official residence as Sovereign of Grimland! It was a brave sight, for the sky was cloudless and the snow-covered city sparkled into a myriad smiles under the kiss of the winter sun. Every roof wore its gleaming mantle, its shimmering festoons of stainless crystals; and the countless icicles which depended from a thousand eaves glistened like huge diamonds in the vivifying sunlight.

First marched the Guards, their band playing the "Rothlied," which had now become the national anthem. Then came the Red Hussars with their bright uniforms, bay chargers, and gaily-pennoned lances. Then the Guides on skis—a popular contingent, judging from the cheers they drew. Then the Queen's Bodyguard, with Von Hügelweiler at their head. Then the gilt, lumbering State carriage, with its solitary occupant, a pale little figure, bowing to right and left, smiling, nervous, pathetically isolated,—a pearl in a huge gold setting. Next came distinguished personages on horseback, amongst them Trafford on a great chestnut charger, and Father Bernhardt in dead black, seated on a big mare of the same funereal hue. Then Dragoons,

then Police with Doctor Matti in dark uniform and cocked hat. More carriages and powdered coachmen; more Dragoons, more Guards, Guides, and Grenadiers, with a strong contingent of Horse Artillery to wind up with.

Nothing was lacking either in the splendour of the procession or the enthusiasm of the onlookers.

Within the cathedral the solemn ceremony of coronation was conducted by the Archbishop of Weidenbruck, who maintained the traditional enmity to Karl exhibited by his predecessor. And the vast Gothic building was crowded with nobles and dignitaries, and a great many others who were very far from being noble or dignified, but who had been admitted lest the many absentees should leave conspicuous gaps on the marble pavement. For there were many of the older families of Grimland to whom the events of the last few days were abhorrent, and who regarded the haste of the coronation as something shameless and indecent. Neither, of course, were there any foreign representatives present. Grimland was not a great power, but its callous condonence of a crime had shocked the moral sense of Christendom. But Bernhardt had insisted on rapidity of action, and for the moment his word was law.

After the ceremony came the State luncheon in the Muschelsaal, an interminable affair of many viands and divers vintages. Trafford,—seated between a Grafinn of aristocratic lineaments and a deputy's wife with plebeian features and a shrill scheme of attire,—ate little and thought much. His eyes were constantly

on the white-faced girl who sat on the big gilded chair at the head of the centre table. He wondered if he had ever seen anything so pale and sad in his life. The girl who had faced outlawry and risked arrest with a light heart and laughing lips seemed crushed and smothered by the pomp and circumstance of her present dignity. She talked and smiled and tasted food and drink, but the Princessin Gloria was dead, and a poor substitute sat in her gorgeous coronation robes as Grimland's Queen.

In time the long repast came to its end, the guests departed, and those who were bidden repaired to the Council in the Throne-room.

At this the Queen, Father Bernhardt, Dr. Matti, Von Hügelweiler, and George Trafford were present. The captain of the Guides ignored the American with studied scorn. The latter responded with an almost imperceptible but intensely irritating smile. So far he had triumphed, for he had occupied a post of great honour in the procession, and Von Hügelweiler felt his enemy's insolence like a galling wound.

The men in turn proffered formal congratulations to the freshly-crowned Sovereign. Gloria thanked them with a determined effort at graciousness.

"Most women, my good friends, have one day in their lives," she concluded with the ghost of a smile. "This is mine. I have had my experience. I know what it feels like to drive through a mile and a half of cheering men and women, to sit in a gilded carriage with a myriad eyes focussed on my poor, pale face. I know the solemn moment when the sacred oil is poured

on my hair and the golden rim of sovereignty set on my brow. I have dreamed of these things, and the dream was at least as real as the reality. It is a wonderful thing to be a Queen—but—but—”

“ But what, madam? ” asked Dr. Matti.

The big doctor looked rather more ridiculous as Chief of Police than as a drenched revolutionary in the Cathedral Square. He was the only one present who seemed out of place in the sumptuous Throne-room. Von Hügelweiler was an aristocrat, and a handsome one at that. Bernhardt, despite his wild, black eyes, was a man of breeding and palpable distinction. Trafford, with his bold features, fierce moustache, and picturesque green uniform, might have been a Polish count of bluest blood and innumerable quarterings. But Matti, with his big hands, heavy features, and ungainly figure, was plebeian from the soles of his enormous feet to the tips of his spatulate fingers. The romance of the situation had no appeal for him. He served the Queen, not because she was young and beautiful, but because he honestly believed Karl to have been a cruel and corrupt monarch, and he hoped for a regenerate and better ordered State under his successor. He represented the prose of the revolution, the grim sense of duty which often makes revolutionaries absolutely callous of individual suffering, so long as their concept of human happiness be furthered.

So now he had no sympathy with Gloria’s mood of weakness.

“ But what, madam? ” he repeated.

She laughed a little hysterically.

"I am not sure it is not better fun to be an exile," she sighed.

The doctor winced visibly at her words.

"Life was not meant for fun," he said irritably.

"Mine was, I think," she retorted. "A certain gentleman, by name Herr Saunders, told me I should soon tire of the routine and *régime* of Queenhood. I laughed him to scorn, but I am beginning to think he knew me better than I knew myself."

"Your position has responsibilities as well as pleasures," pursued the doctor. "For instance, we shall have a stern fight to win the recognition of the foreign powers. The assassination of poor Karl,—a brilliant idea on Herr Trafford's part, and a proceeding of which I thoroughly approve,—will take a little swallowing by the Chanceries of Europe."

"Poor Karl!" Gloria murmured.

"Moreover," the doctor went on, ignoring the comment, "the mere fact of coronation,—important though it may be,—is not necessarily a guarantee of unopposed sovereignty. We have reports from the north-east of Grimland that there is considerable dissatisfaction with the *coup d'état* which has just proved fatal to your Majesty's predecessor. They say that the district of Weissheim is in something very like open revolt."

Gloria laughed mirthlessly.

"I am glad to hear of it," she said. "What is the worth to me of the royalty of men who change their allegiance as readily as they change their coats? Karl was a man. He had his faults, his crimes, if report

speaks true; but men licked his hand when he was alive, and I honour them if they fight for his memory when he is dead."

"Bravo!" cried Trafford enthusiastically, and heedless of the black looks his interjection drew from Von Hügelweiler and Dr. Matti. "Bravo! That's the spirit I draw my sword for. I liked what I saw of Karl. He seemed to me a gentleman, and a good sportsman. Had I not heard of his cruelty to the late Archbishop, I don't know that I should have cared to take a hand against him."

"The story of his cruelty to the Archbishop was a lie," put in Father Bernhardt. "I ought to know," he went on, in answer to the astonished looks of his hearers, "for I invented it myself. Karl was a humane man and a moral man. Years ago I loved him. Afterwards I loved his wife,—and that made a difference."

Dr. Matti looked deep disgust. He was a family man with strong, not to say Puritan, views on morality. He knew—who did not?—that Bernhardt had eloped some years ago with Karl's consort, but he had always imagined the ex-priest to have been actuated by a disinterested desire to deliver the poor woman from a brutal and tyrannical husband. Bernhardt read the doctor's expression, and laughed.

"The devil tempted me,"—he went on, with a positive delight in shocking the worthy burgher,—“and I fell. The love I had for Karl turned to hatred. I fought against him,—I lied against him,—I swore to effect his downfall, and I effected it; but now that he is

dead I wish to clear his memory. Karl was never guilty of inhumanity. He might be stern when occasion warranted. He might be unscrupulous in his methods of suppressing sedition; he would have been a fool had he not been so; but he never stooped to torture. Tell that abroad, my friends. Karl was a clean man, a just man, and if I compassed his ruin it was because that was the price I paid to Satan for the glories of his fellowship."

All were silent at these words, but Gloria put her hands before her eyes and shuddered. Her pallor became, if possible, intensified. She appeared tired out, and as if suffering from a splitting headache.

"It seems we have been fighting under false pretences," she said wearily.

It was Von Hügelweiler who answered her.

"Karl is dead," he said. "I sided against him, not because I hated him, but because I wished to serve the Princessin Gloria von Schattenberg. Long live the Queen!"

"Long live the Queen!" echoed Dr. Matti without enthusiasm. "If Karl was a good man, he is in heaven. *Requiescat in pace.* We must accept facts, and our first duty is to pacify the country."

"That means an expedition to Weissheim," put in Father Bernhardt. "The district is in a ferment. However, our friends Von Hügelweiler and Herr Trafford, with a few regiments of sharp-shooters, will put that right in a few days."

"More bloodshed!" sighed Gloria.

"The authority of the new Government must be

respected," declared Dr. Matti. "We must have no false sentimentality."

Gloria rose from her seat with a look of a new-born resolution on her ashen face.

"There must be no more fighting," she said imperiously. "I am a Schattenberg, I know, and come of a race accustomed to hold life as a little thing. I plotted against Karl, because my father and brother met their death at his hands. But Karl is dead, and his death is a horrible and ghastly memory to me. The men of Weissheim are my subjects, and I will not have their blood on my hands. Our Government must be respected, you say? We will win respect by mercy and tolerance, then, not by the cannon and the shambles!"

Dr. Matti's countenance was a picture of contemptuous irritation. Bernhardt's head sank on his breast, as if he were deep in thought. The silence was broken by a loud rap at the door. Von Hügelweiler strode across the room and opened it.

There was a moment's whispered consultation.

"A messenger with urgent news, your Majesty," said Hügelweiler at length.

"Admit him!"

A man in plain clothes entered. Trafford recognised him as one of the waiters of the Hôtel Concordia.

"Your news, Gottfried, quick," said Bernhardt. "You are interrupting the Council."

The man bowed low to the Queen.

"I am head of the Intelligence Department, your Majesty," he began, "and I have just received news

of such import that I felt it necessary to interrupt your Majesty's Council in order to impart it."

"Proceed," said Gloria with a slight inclination of her head.

"Your Majesty, there is much trouble at Weissheim. The *burgherschaft* has declared against your sovereignty. The troops refuse to take the oath of allegiance, and the young Prince is cheered wherever seen."

"We know all this," said Bernhardt in some irritation.

"Snow forts are being erected at every strategic point," the man went on, "and heavy pieces of ordnance are being put in position."

"Naturally," said Bernhardt. "We did not imagine they would conduct civil war with popguns."

"Is that all?" demanded Von Hügelweiler.

"No, excellency. There is a report,—a strong report,—that the King is not dead; that he escaped with General Meyer and Herr Saunders, and has made his way to the Palace of the Brunvarad at Weissheim. The wires are cut, and the railway has been blown up in three places, including the great viaduct over the Niederkessel at Eselbruck. It is impossible to obtain direct confirmation, but the rumour is gaining ground even here that Karl somehow escaped our clutches and fled to Weissheim."

At a sign from Bernhardt the man bowed and withdrew.

"A ridiculous rumour, as we have reason to know," said Dr. Matti, appealing to the others.

"We cannot produce his corpse," said Trafford.

"No," said Bernhardt; "that was an oversight on our part. After consigning Karl to the embrace of the Iron Maiden we left his body to his friends. We should have occupied the Neptunburg there and then, and drowned old Meyer in the Palace fountain. As it was, our consciences got the better of us, we fled from the scene of our handiwork without completing our task."

"We should never have begun it," cried Gloria. "I shall never forget the moment when Karl stepped forth and faced the shrieking rabble. The man was a lion among wolves. What followed will haunt me to my grave. And now Father Bernhardt tells us that Karl was a humane man and a moral man, and that it is necessary for us to butcher those of his late subjects who are true to his memory."

"We must forget the past and look to the future," said Dr. Matti sternly. "To display weakness now would only be to increase the sum of human suffering. This expedition must start at once."

The Queen turned in despair to Bernhardt.

"You have heard Gottfried's report," said the ex-priest. "There must be no delay. The expedition must start at once."

"The expedition must start at once," echoed Von Hügelweiler.

Gloria turned to Trafford.

"Yes, yes," said that gentleman absent-mindedly. "By all means let the expedition start at once. I will accompany it."

The Queen rose from the throne.

"The expedition *shall* start at once," she said in tones of unutterable bitterness. "I command that it be so. Gentlemen, I leave you, thanking you for your loyal counsel. This is the day of my life, the dreamed-of day on which I call myself, 'Gloria, Queen of Grimland.' "

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE CHAPEL ROYAL

NERVY TRAFFORD left the Council with the dawning consciousness that he was not a very wise man. There are kings and kings, he reflected, kings to serve, honour and obey, and kings to harass, embarrass and decapitate; but it was best on the whole to leave the choice of treatment to the subjects of the particular monarch to be dealt with. He had sided against Karl from an innate love of excitement and a romantic enthusiasm for the rebel Princess. He had saved Karl from premature death, because he was a well-brought-up American with a sneaking respect for the sixth commandment. The result was, that the revolution,—which had been by no means bloodless,—was likely to be followed by an aftermath of civil war infinitely more sanguinary. Had he not interfered, Karl might still have been on the throne. Had he persisted in his revolutionary policy, logically and relentlessly, Grimland might have found peace and tranquillity under the unopposed banner of Gloria. As it was, Karl was evidently in Weissheim, and the good Weissheimers,—according to Herr Gottfried,—were preparing glacis and grapeshot for those who did not see eye to eye with them in things political.

He found his way to the Rubens room, and seated himself, wondering how long it was necessary to wait

before demanding access to the private apartments. The short winter day was well-nigh done, and the great, unlit chamber looked vast and ghostly in the failing light. The shadowed corners, the rich stillness, touched and oppressed his imagination. Great men and proud women had passed in sumptuous pageantry through the walls of that noble chamber; and Trafford felt their presence, and strove to exorcise them with the fumes of a cigarette. But the impalpable dust of centuries seemed to impregnate the air, and by-gone monarchs looked askance at him from their dim gold frames, in a scornful wonder at the American interloper who sat so carelessly in the seat of kings. He rose, impatient of their glances, and walked to the window. Snow was falling. The sun that had graced and greeted the new-crowned Queen had sunk beneath the rugged outline of the encircling mountains; the sky, which had been of no uncertain blue, was a nondescript monotone weeping a white haze of crystalline tears. His thoughts harked back to the ashen face and sad eyes of the new-crowned Queen. Why had she not grasped the fact that Karl's immurement in the *Eisenmädchen* was a humane act of rescue, not a piece of callous cruelty? She herself had experienced the same hiding-place under the same innocuous conditions, and yet it did not seem to have occurred to her that the spikes might still be reposing at the bottom of his overcoat pocket. That the others should have failed to suspect the truth was only natural. That they would be angry on discovering it, was probable—but for that he cared not one jot.

What troubled his awakening conscience was, that good men and true must go down before peace reigned again in the troubled monarchy of Grimland.

After a few more minutes of such meditation, he made his way through the Rubens-saal in the direction of the private apartments. In the corridor leading to the Queen's chamber stood the officer on guard, and talking to him was no less a personage than Von Hügelweiler.

"My orders are precise," the former was saying. "Her Majesty is resting and will see no one."

"But have the goodness at least to send in my name," Von Hügelweiler returned pettishly.

"It would be no use, Captain," retorted the other. "The Queen is resting and must not be disturbed."

Von Hügelweiler's disappointment showed itself plainly in his crestfallen air.

"I want access to her Majesty," he said doggedly. "It is true that by admitting me you risk offending the Queen, but by not admitting me you offend me for a certainty."

"I am very sorry, Captain," said the officer in a conciliatory manner. He was quite a young man, and he was rather alarmed at having to defy so important a person as Von Hügelweiler had become. Still, he held stoutly to his position in the centre of the corridor.

"You may be sorrier still, if you persist," said the Captain darkly, detecting, as he fancied, symptoms of wavering on the other's part. "We move in strange

times, Lieutenant, and my goodwill is better worth having than my enmity."

At this juncture, Trafford,—who had overheard this conversation, and whose approach had been inaudible on the thick carpet of the Palace corridor,—coughed affectedly, and advanced with admirable swagger.

"I wish to see her Majesty," he said, addressing the lieutenant on guard, and completely ignoring Von Hügelweiler.

It was the latter, however, who answered him.

"The Queen is resting, and will see no one," he said roughly.

Trafford paid not the slightest attention to the Captain's words.

"My name is Trafford," he went on, to the officer.

The Lieutenant's face was a picture of puzzled dismay. His orders were to conduct Trafford to the royal apartments as soon as he presented himself. To all others he was to give the message that her Majesty was exceedingly fatigued and would on no account see anyone. After a moment's embarrassed indecision,—during which he felt Von Hügelweiler's eyes absolutely scorching him,—he bade Trafford follow, and turning his back on the furious Captain, led the way down the long corridor. Arriving at a doorway concealed by a heavy curtain, he pushed open a massive oak portal and signalled Trafford to enter.

The chamber in which the latter now found himself was lofty, smelling of incense, and lit by lamps hanging from a frescoed ceiling. At the far end was an altar garnished with many candles and a silver crucifix.

This undoubtedly was the private chapel of the Neptunburg.

"We are awaiting you," said the quiet voice of Gloria.

Trafford advanced towards the new Queen, who was standing before the steps of the altar in the company of a priest. The chapel was dark, for the stained-glass windows shut out most of the remaining light, and the hanging lamps were little more than points of ruby flame. And yet he could see that Gloria's face was still of an even pallor, and that her eyes were red from recent tears.

"I am a woman of my word, you see," she went on in dull tones. "I promised to marry you under certain conditions, and, those conditions being fulfilled, I waste no time."

"You are carrying out the letter of the contract," returned Trafford, "but are you observing the spirit? I did not bargain for a tearful bride."

"The tears are dried and gone."

"But not the cause that made them flow. You wept because you are a woman, and the woman who regards even the formula of marriage as a little matter has yet to see the light of day. And you wept because you are not sure which thing conscience commands—the violation of a contract or the taking of false vows."

"You are strangely wise to-day," she said with a faint smile. "I did not know such intuition lurked in that wild brain of yours."

"I am right, then?"

"I cannot say"—she hesitated. "Yes, the marriage vow is a serious thing, and this wedding,—as I warned you,—can be no more than a solemn mockery. I am Queen of Grimland. You are a brave man and a gentleman—but you are not a prince of blood royal."

"The Traffords are not people of particularly humble origin," he retorted drily.

"Nor would it affect me if they were. But the State would never sanction my marriage with a commoner."

"Then is it worth while going through the mockery?" he demanded.

"I have asked myself that question, and the answer is that you find me here. My word is pledged."

"Your word, but not your heart."

"Ah, but I once told you that I had no heart."

"Then you uttered a falsehood," he insisted. "Your heart,—whose existence you deny,—bled at the thought of Karl's suffering. Your heart, which was disposed to entertain some kindly emotion for me, has cooled towards me because I compassed Karl's cruel demise."

"Go on, wise man!"

"I will not ask you if I am right," pursued Trafford, "for I read acquiescence in those tear-spoiled eyes. But I will say one thing more: as Queen of Grimland your marriage to me will be null and void. What if you are deposed from your sovereignty, and became again Gloria von Schattenberg, the exile?"

"That will not occur just yet," she replied.

"I am not so certain," he mused. "What if those rumours mentioned by Gottfried were true in substance and in fact? What if Karl really escaped with General Meyer and Saunders and others to Weissheim? What if Grimland's King is still in his own country, alive, alert, surrounded by sage counsel and loyal hearts? Is your position *then* so very sure?"

"But Karl was put into the *Eisenmädchen*," she protested wonderingly.

"So were you," was Trafford's retort.

"I—yes. But you had unscrewed all the spikes. The Maiden was as harmless as an unfanged snake."

"I put those spikes in my overcoat pocket," said Trafford slowly. "They are still—in my overcoat pocket."

For a dazed moment Gloria stood staring at him. Then she reeled—literally—grasping at the altar rails for support.

"You put him into the Iron Maiden—to save his life?" she gasped.

"That was my rough idea. You see, I am an American, and I hate killing things—especially brave things. There are plenty of men I would kill in the heat of battle—one or two, perhaps, whom I would kill without much heat, but Karl,—whatever his deeds or misdeeds,—was playing the man that night in the Palace yard, and I would sooner have cut off my right hand than have done him an injury. Forgive me, your Majesty, for I served you badly. Providence, which gave me a fair share of muscle and brute courage, was stinting to me in the matter of logic. I should

have been logical and replaced the spikes in the *Eisenmädchen.*"

"Herr Trafford!"

A hand was laid on Trafford's arm, and in the scanty light of the shadowy chapel the American found himself looking into eyes bright with tears, but tears not of sorrow or vexation, but of happiness and vast relief.

"Oh, what a weight you have taken from off my heart—it was heavier than I could bear," she murmured. "I felt like a murderer, a guilty creature who had risen through blood to the summit of her base ambitions."

"Then I am forgiven?"

"There is nothing to forgive. You have helped me and served me with your splendid impetuosity and your fearless resource. A Grimlander would have slain Karl, and crowned his service with a deed of shame. You were illogical—and I—I almost love you for your noble lack of logic."

"You almost love me?" he asked in a trance.

"At least as much as I have ever loved—"

She broke off suddenly, and smiling upon him one of her rarest smiles, she added: "Yes, George Trafford, I will marry you, and if the Queen of Grimland cannot wed an American, then I will no longer be Queen of Grimland."

Trafford gazed into the pale, brave face as he had never gazed at any living thing. His breath caught with a short gasp. A strange fire had sprung to quivering life in his bosom; a wild march was pealing in his ravished ears. His feet were no longer on the

chequered marble pavement of the Chapel Royal, but somewhere in the fine regions of rolling planets and shimmering nebulae. It was no mere human being who bent over that sweet young face and kissed the warm tears from the drooping eyelids as he breathed the one word "Gloria" in an echo of long-drawn sound, but a demi-god, an heroic anachronism with the passions of Phoebus in his kindling soul.

"I thought love was worship," he said, as he strained the slim form to him. "So it is, and something more—something infinitely and deliciously more."

"We are in church," she remonstrated, gently disengaging herself, "and not alone."

But again he kissed her, and this time gently on the brow.

"I was forgetting all things save one," he said, "and that is that you love me."

"Almost love you," she corrected, with a sigh.

"At least as much as you loved the others," he affirmed.

"And that contents you?" she demanded, raising her eyebrows in well-feigned astonishment.

Her question puzzled him.

"It ought not to, of course," he said with wrinkled brow. "I ought to want all or nothing. But I would be content if it were even less you gave, for in the dim light of this ancient chamber I seem to see the workings of Fate."

"Then you are willing on such a basis to go on with the ceremony?"

"If you are content to do so," he returned gravely, "knowing that Karl is alive and may prevail, and that in that event no Parliament will trouble to undo what the good priest does this afternoon."

Gloria looked him frankly in the face.

"I, too, believe in Fate," she said softly, after a pause; and then, slipping her arm into his, "Father Ambrose, you have been summoned here for a purpose. Fulfil that purpose."

CHAPTER TWENTY

BERNHARDT DISTURBED

WHILE the woman whom he had helped to a throne was being secretly married to George Trafford, Father Bernhardt was sitting alone in his private apartments in the Neptunburg. The room he had chosen for his use was a small chamber on the second floor, overlooking the courtyard. The blinds were drawn, the electric light was burning, and the ex-priest was seated in a comfortable arm-chair reading the poems of Paul Verlaine. At his side were a wine-glass and a big *carafe* containing a pale green viscous fluid. He seemed to be enjoying his relaxation, for a smile constantly flitted across his face, and as some mordant line appealed more especially to his grim humour he would repeat it several times out loud in manifest appreciation. From time to time he sipped the fluid at his elbow, and it was remarkable that each time he did so he cast a quick look behind him as if fully expecting to see someone.

A rap at the door brought a slight frown to his brow, and the knock had to be repeated before he gave the necessary permission to enter. The intruder was Von Hügelweiler.

"Well, what is it, Captain?" asked Bernhardt impatiently.

Von Hügelweiler's glance took in the nature of the

other man's diversion, and a suspicion of contempt showed itself in his curling lip.

"I have news, sir," he said.

"Out with it!"

"Karl is alive!"

"So Gottfried said. The Iron Maiden seems to have grown humane in her old age."

Hügelweiler studied the man whose influence was then paramount in Weidenbruck, and his contempt grew. In common with others, he had been wont to fear Bernhardt. The burning eyes, the quick, imperious brain, the general air of reckless strength were things that impressed the well-born soldier, as they impressed the low-born mob. But Bernhardt sipping absinthe was a different person from the fire-brand of the revolution, and Hügelweiler realised that the lethargic sensualist of the arm-chair needed strong words to rouse him.

"The Iron Maiden has not grown humane," he said, "but there is a traitor in our midst."

Bernhardt sipped pensively.

"How very interesting!" he said.

"Very!" echoed Hügelweiler scornfully. "Before Karl was put into the *Eisenmädchen* someone had removed the spikes. The pretended execution was nothing more nor less than a scheme to save the King's life."

"A most ingenious scheme."

Von Hügelweiler banged his fist on the table.

"That is one piece of news!" he cried irritably. "It does not seem to move you very deeply; perhaps

my second item will affect you more. The Queen has just gone through the ceremony of marriage with Trafford the American!"

Again Bernhardt raised his glass.

"I drink to the happy pair," he said blandly.

Hügelweiler almost screamed with vexation.

"It is scandalous!" he protested, almost with tears in his eyes. "The thing must be annulled. The Queen of Grimland must not wed a commoner, a foreign adventurer, a man who at a crisis turns traitor and saves the dethroned King's life."

A spark of interest glinted into the ex-priest's eye.

"By the way," he asked, "how did you find all this out?"

The question let loose a fresh flood of indignation from the Captain. In tones of choking wrath he told how he had been forbidden the royal presence, and how Trafford had been accorded instant admission.

"That was too much for a man of my kidney," he went on. "I brushed aside the young fool who was doing duty on guard, and I followed this American pig down the corridor. I found myself in the chapel, and I hid myself in the gloom behind a pew. Then I overheard things—pretty things, pretty speeches, tales of the American's mercy, how he had saved the King's life because he disliked killing a brave man. Then these two,—the Queen of Grimland and the traitor who should have been immured in the Strafeburg,—kissed each other and were made man and wife by a damned old fool in a cassock."

"Always speak respectfully of the Church, my son,"

said Bernhardt with exasperating mockery. "I was, myself, one of its most shining ornaments."

"Can nothing rouse you to the seriousness of the situation?" demanded the Captain in despair.

Again Bernhardt sipped. Then he leaned back, and a slow smile spread over his face.

"You don't drink absinthe, do you, Captain?"

"No," replied the other with an expression of disgust.

"It is a strange fluid," went on Bernhardt thoughtfully. "Sometimes it clears the brain, so that one sees with extraordinary distinctness. But sometimes it obfuscates the reasoning powers, so that one cannot distinguish right from wrong. For instance, at the present moment, *Herr* Trafford's action appears to me not a wicked, but a positively virtuous one. He saved a man from a cruel death and delivers him to freedom instead of torture."

"But the man was Karl!" expostulated Von Hügelweiler.

"I loved Karl," returned Bernhardt, unmoved, "I loved and hated him. You,—not being an *absintheur*,—cannot understand the curious mental pose that loves and hates the same being at the same time. Also I love *Herr* Trafford. He got me out of the Strafeburg."

Von Hügelweiler made a gesture of despair. He felt he was talking to a madman, one on whom sense and argument were useless and unavailing.

"But the marriage!" he said, raising his voice unconsciously to a shout in the desperate effort to drive

home his point. "The marriage must be cancelled! When the truth is known that Trafford helped Karl to escape he will become the most hated man in Weidenbruck. The Queen must never unite her fortunes with such a creature."

Bernhardt gaped, as if the matter had begun to bore him.

"Then the truth must not be known," he said, between his yawns.

"But it shall be known!" cried the soldier angrily. "I shall proclaim it myself from the housetops. The mad American must be whipped out of the country."

"Captain von Hügelweiler," said the ex-priest solemnly, "just now I was enjoying two things: some deliciously bitter poetry and some deliciously bitter liquid. At the present moment I am incapacitated by your disturbing presence from enjoying either. Do I make myself plain?"

Von Hügelweiler turned to go with a stifled oath.

"A fine time for dissipation!" he said, as a parting shaft. "The fortunes of the country are at stake, and Bernhardt, Father Bernhardt, the people's leader, the man of the hour, swills absinthe and absorbs the pernicious writings of a decadent poetaster."

In a flash the ex-priest was on his feet, with blazing eyes and an air of almost terrible menace. Von Hügelweiler thought he had been talking to a sodden drunkard. He found himself confronted by the embodiment of masterful and savage energy.

"You fool!" cried Bernhardt in tones of withering contempt. "May not a man rest? May not a strange

man rest in a strange way? I do the work of a hundred—must not the brain be fed and the nerves braced to meet the strain?"

The Captain shrugged his shoulders weakly. Despite his own strong feelings, the other's imperiousness cowed him.

"Go!" continued Bernhardt, pointing to the door. "Go, and hold your peace! Tell nobody this tale of Karl's escape and who contrived it. Tell no one this tale of the secret marriage in the Chapel Royal. I forbid you to speak. The nation's destinies are in my keeping, not yours."

Von Hügelweiler went to the door, smarting under the lash of the tongue.

"Has the American bewitched you, as he has bewitched Gloria von Schattenberg?" he asked, summoning up a spark of courage before quitting the room.

"Aye," retorted Bernhardt, "he has certain very fascinating qualities. He is a man, Von Hügelweiler. Pray to your God, if you believe in Him, to make you one."

And with an oath on his lips, and wrath and rebellion in his heart, Von Hügelweiler flung himself from the ex-priest's chamber.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

DREAMS

THE following morning George Trafford awoke from sweet dreams to the pleasant consciousness of hot coffee and crisp rolls. He was still occupying apartments in the Hôtel Concordia, and it was a waiter in that excellent establishment who roused him from the glories of slumberland at the hour of 8.30.

"Good-morning, Rudolf," said Trafford, opening a reluctant eye. "I trust you have not forgotten my honey this morning."

"I have brought the honey, your Excellency; also a letter." Trafford glanced at the handwriting on the envelope.

"Sweeter also than the honey and the honeycomb," he murmured. "A letter from dreamland, Rudolf! Tell me, Rudolf, do waiters dream?"

The man laughed.

"Not often, Excellency. They are too busy by day. Once I dreamed that I was appointed headwaiter at the Concordia."

"Ah! you are ambitious, Rudolf. My dreams are less exalted. I only dreamed that a certain *gnadiges fräulein* did more than 'almost' love me; that she even cared for me 'more than the others.' It was not a bad dream, Rudolf," he added, casting his eyes over the missive, "and the letter is not a bad awakening."

“ You have read it, Excellency?”

“ Yes, it is short and sweet. ‘ *Meet me at the confectioner’s at the corner of the Königstrasse and the Elizabethstrasse at eleven.*’ That is all, but the imagination riots at the choice of rendezvous. A sensuous woman would have chosen a restaurant, an extravagant one a milliner’s. Only a sweet one could have thought of a pastrycook’s.”

“ I wish your Excellency joy.”

“ Thank you, Rudolf; my small change is reposing on the edge of the mantelpiece; kindly select a five-krone piece and drink to my good fortune.”

At eleven o’clock Trafford was waiting outside a big corner shop, whose ample windows revealed an alluring wealth of edible magnificence. Hardly had the church clock finished striking when a young woman drew near. The combination of blue veil and Russian sables was one Trafford had seen before, and being in uniform he saluted.

“ Come inside,” said Gloria.

Trafford followed obediently.

“ It’s so like you to meet me in a place of this kind,” he said.

“ We must meet somewhere,” she returned, and there was a half-mischiefous glint in the eyes that looked back into his eyes as she added:—“ after what happened yesterday. It’s no good meeting at the Neptunburg—a palace has all the luxuries of an ideal home, except privacy. This is one of the places where I was known in my days of exile, and they will serve us chocolate and éclairs in a private room.”

"Do you know I dreamed of you last night," began Trafford, as soon as they were alone in a cosy little room at the back.

"Naturally," she laughed.

"And in my dream you were very kind."

"Again, naturally."

"I mean," said Trafford tentatively, "you loved me 'more than the others.'"

"You are most diverting," she said, smiling.

Trafford winced.

"You are not taking me very seriously?" he asked.

"How can I take anything very seriously? If I did, I should go mad. I am a Queen, and Queens must marry. Custom compels. As an exile I had no difficulty in maintaining my spinsterhood. Now, it is different. If I do not marry you—marry you, mind, not merely go through a marriage form with you—I shall be wedded to some young German or Austrian Prince-ling, whose standard of manhood is measured by the number of beer *seidles* he can empty in an evening."

"I am flattered. And now for a few practical considerations. Supposing you marry me—and like you, I am using the word in its fullest sense—what will be the result? What will the public say?"

"The public will say little, but it will do a good deal," said Gloria grimly. "It is true we are moving in a time of great changes; it is true that for the moment you are a very popular person. But it is also true that I am a Queen and you a commoner, and Grimlanders like their Royalty undiluted. If we proclaimed ourselves man and wife we should be wise to board the

Orient express at Gleis, and steam westward to Ostend or eastward to Constantinople."

"And you would really—really object to that course?" asked Trafford a little sadly. "Yesterday afternoon you said, 'If the Queen of Grimland may not wed an American I will no longer be Queen of Grimland.'"

"Ah, but I spoke in a moment of enthusiasm," declared Gloria unblushingly. "I had been oppressed by the nightmare of Karl's supposed assassination. The fact that he had not really been killed, that it was your ready wit that saved him from a cruel end, warmed my heart wonderfully towards you. But if you had your dream last night, so had I. Mine was less sentimental but equally pleasant. In it I saw myself Queen of Grimland, Queen of a whole country, with no district in revolt against me. Karl had been defeated, captured, and exiled. I was the reigning sovereign of a loyal and loving people."

Trafford nodded gravely.

"That is the dream of a Schattenberg," he said. "It is much the same dream that your father dreamed before he fell into the great sleep where there are no dreams. But it is not the dream of the woman I kissed yesterday afternoon in the Chapel Royal of the Neptunburg."

Gloria's eyes fell before his steadfast gaze. Her face softened; it saddened under a wave of emotion—an emotion, the instant expression of which, though easily attributable to her actress-temperament, was nevertheless based on something far deeper.

"I wonder if I am a hard woman," she began, still looking down. "Years of exile, of earning one's living on the variety stage, striving—surely these are not softening influences." She paused for him to add some sympathetic word. Whether he intended to do so or not, he forgot it on meeting the eyes that now were looking him through and through, as she continued: "But I do not unsay what I said yesterday! I really like you, immensely—and perhaps I almost love you."

Trafford took her hand and kissed it rapturously; she almost snatched it away, and there was a ring of steel in the tones that now declared:

"But I have tasted power, and now that the horror of Karl's death is no longer on my conscience, I wish to be the unopposed ruler of my country."

"Even though the process of establishing your rule costs the lives of brave men?"

Again she dropped her eyes—was silenced. She sipped her chocolate. When she spoke, it was quietly, and with absolute conviction.

"If I had known what Father Bernhardt told us, that Karl was really a humane man and was absolutely innocent of the Archbishop's death, I don't believe I should have headed a rebellion against him. But—rightly or wrongly—the rebellion has succeeded and the seat of government is mine. To falter now would be to cause more misery and bloodshed than to go on. The people have declared against Karl, and Karl they will not have at any price. If I were to abdicate, some other adventurer would take my place. To withdraw

myself from Grimland now would be to leave my friends to the certain reprisals of their enemies."

"Your argument is flawless," acknowledged Trafford. "I am *de trop*. Ambition, to say nothing of humanity, leaves you but one course. Neither do I complain—though I shall return a disappointed man. You are not heartless, far from it, for yesterday in a moment of golden light I caught a glimpse of a great splendour, the gorgeous harmonies of a woman's heart. The vision has faded, and again I say I do not complain. On the contrary, I thank Providence for the vision of what might have been."

A more prolonged silence followed these words. Trafford busied himself with his éclair, while his companion continued to stir her chocolate, till a veritable whirlpool formed in its opaque depths. At last she looked up.

"Of course, I'm not heartless," she said,—and she smiled as a coquette might smile on being told that her flirtations were dangerous,—"and of course, I like you very much, only you miss the whole gist of my argument. If we announce our marriage now we shall be drummed out of the country. That might suit you, but it doesn't harmonise with the ideals that have been instilled into me from my earliest years. If you accompany me in this projected expedition to Weissheim,—not as my husband, but as my officer,—if you exert your skill and valour on my behalf and help to capture Karl and win me back my old home—the Marienkastel—there is no knowing what the enthusiasm of the Grimlander would not do for you. If we

return as conquerors, what more fitting crown to our pageant than the union of the vindicated Queen and her triumphant General?"

Trafford gazed at the mantled cheek and the light of expectancy that shone in her eyes now. Certain words of Saunders' came back, ringing in his ears: "When you really fall in love you will refuse to take 'No' for an answer. In the words of the pre-historic doggerel, you will 'try, try again.'"

"I see," he said, "I have done something, but I have not done enough. I will accompany you to Weissheim—a unit of your force—and I will do my best to serve your cause. What has passed between us is nothing, must make no difference in our relations, is merely the burlesque conclusion of a burlesque compact. I thought I saw the working of Fate in the incensed gloom of the Chapel Royal. The next few weeks will prove me an idle visionary or a true seer." He paused. "Which do you wish me to prove?"

She rose to her feet, opened her sable cloak, and disengaged a pearl brooch from her neck. Bending over him so that her breath swept his cheek, she fastened the trinket to the lapel of his green tunic, and finished his subjugation with a long look into his eyes.

"A true seer," she answered.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE WAR ON THE WINE-SHOP

OUTSIDE the confectioner's Gloria let down her veil again, and turned her steps towards the Neptunburg.

Trafford, at her request, took the opposite direction. His habitually fierce features wore a grimmer look than ever,—for his brows were knit and his teeth set,—and there was a dangerous gleam in his grey eyes. He was the prey to a host of indefinable emotions, that worked his turbulent spirit to its most aggressive mood. Disappointment, a tinge of bitterness, coupled with a wild sense of intoxication,—caused by the Princess's last relenting act of grace,—had strung his fine nervous system to a point when it demanded violent action as the only possible relief. Had he been at Harvard he would have kindled a bonfire; had Karl been within a reasonable radius of his activity, he would have headed a cutting-out expedition to capture that unhappy monarch. As it was, he walked fast, bending his steps unconsciously towards his hotel. The sky showed a pale blue between the lines of house-tops, for as usual the sun was having its morning duel with the white fog that haunts the streets of Weidenbruck at this period of the year. The sun was winning, too,—as it generally did for an hour or so,—and even causing the huge icicles that hung from the eaves to drip a little at their sharp and glistening extremities. But Trafford noted none of these things.

"I am very ill or very much too well," he said to himself, in diagnosis of his own feverish unrest. "If I were an Elizabethan courtier I should write a sonnet; if I were an ordinary American I should play tennis or golf. Being neither, I am suffering the torments of a wild beast in a small cage; my brain is bursting from enforced inaction. Saunders, who is always right, calls me a madman, and to justify his opinion I shall probably break a shop window in about two minutes."

Whether or no he had the slightest intention of putting his insane threat into execution, he looked behind him to see if he were observed. A couple of men were following a few paces in his rear. To his excited fancy there seemed something sinister about their muffled forms. One carried a thick stick, and both seemed to look on him with eyes of malice.

"As I live, I believe they are going to attack me," he said gleefully to himself. "No," he reflected, "the wish is father to the thought. There is not the slightest reason why they should attack me. They are probably respectable burghers doing a morning's shopping in the Königstrasse."

The original idea, however, fascinated him, and he stopped; the men stopped too. He went on, and the men went on, and a backward glance told him that they were summoning a third person from across the street, and pointing at him as an object either of curiosity or offence. He continued his walk with a wild hope in his heart, and in the course of a hundred yards the hope became a certainty. A small crowd was now

dogging his footsteps, and such uncomplimentary references as "traitor," "spy" and "*schweinhund*" assailed his ears. The situation would have alarmed most men, and would have accorded even "Nervy" Trafford a certain measure of uneasiness under ordinary conditions. But in his present state of psychical unrest the atmosphere of danger had a marvellously relieving effect. The fever went out of his bones, his blood slackened to a normal speed, his brain adjusted itself to meet the crisis. He was still spoiling for a fight, but seething pugnacity had given way to ice-cool combativeness. He walked on without quickening his pace, and though he looked neither to right nor left, he felt instinctively that the numbers of his retinue were swelling fast. The hum of muttered execrations rose to a stronger note, and every yard of his progress brought fresh idlers in his wake. From time to time he passed a policeman, but these were gorgeously uniformed officials whose idea of upholding civic dignity was to adopt a pose of statuesque aloofness to things human and divine.

Presently a piece of frozen snow struck him on the nape of his neck. He swung round in a fury, and as he did so the foremost of the pack struck his shako from his head.

"Von Hügelweiler!" he cried, recognising in his roughly-clad assailant the Captain of the Guard; and quick as thought he planted a sledge-hammer blow full in his rival's face. The Captain staggered and fell, and profiting by the diversion, Trafford crossed the wide street and plunged into a narrow alley. He

was running now, doubling in and out of the congested slums that formed this quarter of the town: and if there was no fear in his heart, there was a growing appreciation of the fact that his life was in danger, and that a single-handed contest with an infuriated mob was an unsatisfactory way of working off superfluous energy. For a space he threaded his rapid way through the winding alleys round the Goose-market, but the hue and cry was strong, and the neighbourhood seemed momentarily more fit for deeds of violence.

But Trafford had not lost his head, and there was a motive in his flight that was born of quick thought and prospective vengeance rather than panic fear. At the door of a certain wine-shop he halted breathless; a backward glance showed his nearest pursuer fifty yards distant.

“Herr Krantz!” he called, bursting into the *brasserie*.

“Mein Herr?”

“Do you recognise me?”

The man surveyed him coolly.

“I never forget a face, Excellency,” he answered.

“Good!” said Trafford. “And are you still loyal to the good Queen Gloria?”

The man nodded as if the question was unnecessary.

“Then you will help me,” said Trafford; “I am being attacked by her enemies.”

Hardly had he spoken when a wild-looking man entered the shop with upraised bludgeon and a cry of “Traitor!” Trafford picked up a convenient beer-can and floored the intruder with a well-directed blow.

"Close the door and shut the shutters!" called out Trafford, drawing his sword and holding at bay a couple of ruffians who had outrun the main body of his pursuers.

There was little time to spare, but there were one or two early customers of Herr Krantz, who lent instant and unquestioning aid. These helped Trafford hold the narrow street till the landlord had set his oaken shutters in front of the glass shop-front. Then, as the increasing pressure threatened to overwhelm them, they darted into the shop, banged the door, and shot the massive bolts. A rattle of blows resounded on the woodwork, and a chorus of fierce cries came in strident chorus from the crowded lane. Krantz switched up the electric light to relieve the darkness.

"I will telephone for the police," he said.

"No," said Trafford, who did not share his host's confidence in the Weidenbruck constabulary. "Ring up the Palace."

Krantz retired to the telephone in the inner room, and the hammering on door and shutters went on with redoubled violence.

"What is it that they want?" asked the inmates of the shop of Trafford.

"Me," replied the latter.

"Why?"

Trafford had but the vaguest idea, but he answered boldly:

"Because I am the Queen's friend."

"I have given a message that you are here and in danger," said Herr Krantz, returning.

“Thanks. Are your shutters sound?”

“I believe so, Excellency.”

“I am glad to hear it. I think we should be well advised to go to an upper window and survey the prospect.”

Krantz assented, and led the way up a dark and narrow stair to a room on the first floor. Opening the double windows, Trafford surveyed a scene of many heads; the confined thoroughfare was literally crammed with a sea of human beings. All were shouting, and those whose position enabled them to do so were banging against the defences with sticks and fists.

“I trust Herr Krantz’s shutters are as sound as he thinks,” he muttered looking down on the surging mass of his enemies. “What an excitable folk these good Weidenbruckers are! I suppose that cross-grained beast, Von Hügelweiler, has been concocting some evil tale about me, and is egging them on to pull me to pieces in revenge for his defeat on the Rundsee. But he finds me in good fighting trim, and I will follow up that blow on the nose with other attentions if I get half a chance.”

He craned his head sideways, to take full stock of his adversaries, and as he did so it came into contact with a huge icicle, one of the many that hung like gigantic dragon’s teeth from the over-hanging eaves. The slight shock to his cranium instilled a fresh idea.

“Have you any snow on your roof, Herr Krantz?” he asked, drawing back into the room.

“The pitch is steep and throws off the snow, Excellency, but there may be a hundredweight or two.”

"And can we get on to the roof?"

"If you will."

"We might create a diversion," pursued Trafford. "A little snow distributed scientifically on the heads of these good people might have a wonderfully cooling effect on their heated tempers."

Krantz doubted the wisdom of further infuriating the mob, but Trafford's enthusiasm was infectious, and he won his way.

A steep ladder and a trap-door gave access to the tiled roof. A shovel was procured, and in a few seconds a small avalanche was dislodged on to the more aggressive bombarders of the oak shutters. The effect was excellent, and a desire to edge away from the immediate proximity of the wine-shop manifested itself. Trafford, however, was seen, and his image served to increase the streperous chorus of execration below. He replied with a mocking bow and a shovel-full of snow tossed lightly into the middle of the throng. For the moment he held the advantage: curses were met with jeers; threats with a polite obeisance; any symptom of action was countered with a swift reprisal of hurtling snow. But the situation was not allowed to remain definitely favourable. Among the crowd was someone with an intelligent brain as well as an excitable nature. Von Hügelweiler at this time was as full of the sentiment of human hate as an insulted and disappointed egotist could be. The blow he had received had been the last straw. A bullet in his breast or a sword through his arm would not have burned with such a fire of shame as the crude, coarse

shock of his rival's fist. All sense of proportion, all notion of justice, let alone mercy, had long ago been swamped by the bitter tide of maddening disappointment which poisoned his best instincts. And now the lust of vengeance,—baulked for the moment by his enemy's resource,—led him to do rather a clever thing. There was a small fire-station hard by Krantz's *brasserie*, and this, with the assistance of his chosen followers, Von Hügelweiler raided. A few minutes later, helmet on head and axe in hand, he and some half-dozen desperadoes returned hopefully to the attack.

As the first axe-blow crashed into the oaken wood-work, Trafford sent a mass of snow on to the assailant. The man shook under the weight, but his helmet protected him, and he went on with his work undeterred.

In vain Trafford and his companions shovelled their crystalline ammunition on to the heads and shoulders of their attackers; they delayed the work of irruption, but delayed it immaterially. It was the crowd's turn to jeer now, for the axes were playing havoc with the stout shutters, and it seemed a matter of minutes only before oak yielded to steel, and the inevitable rush of furious humanity flooded the beer-house.

"We are undone," said one of Trafford's companions; "we must try and escape over the roofs."

"One moment," said Trafford, sprawling at full length on the tiles, his head hanging over the eaves. "Herr Krantz, sit on my legs."

The proprietor, a man of weight, did as he was bid. With the hilt of his sword Trafford banged at the

base of one of the huge icicles that fringed the overhanging cornice. At the third blow it parted—four feet of glistening ice pointed to dagger fineness descended like a javelin on to the back of one of the storming party. The man fell without a sound. A snarl, half horror and half rage, burst from the crowd. His comrades raised his limp and lifeless body from the snow, and bore it from the danger zone.

“Forward again!” cried Von Hügelweiler, furiously rushing against the shop and burying his hatchet in the splintering shutter.

But Trafford was busy dislodging another icicle of even more formidable dimensions, and when that was used there were a score of others. The men drew back; one traitor’s life was not worth the risk, and Von Hügelweiler, finding himself unsupported, withdrew too.

Whether caution would have prevailed, or whether the spirited harangue which Von Hügelweiler now addressed to his followers would have had its effect, can never be known. A diversion, more serious than hurtling snow or crashing icicle, occurred to change men’s moods. A troop of horse, cuirassed, high-booted, armed with naked swords, was making its slow but irresistible way down the congested thoroughfare; and in the midst, with black slouch hat and sable uniform, rode the grimly smiling person of Father Bernhardt. A cheer greeted him, for his errand was unknown, and he might have come, for all they knew, to help in taking the traitor. If that was their idea, however, they were soon undeceived. The ex-priest’s

quick eye detected Von Hügelweiler, and the latter, reading its sinister message, commenced a hasty retreat.

"Two hundred *kronen* to the man who brings me Von Hügelweiler, dead or alive!" called out Bernhardt.

There was a movement in the crowd, and in it the late Captain of the Guard was lost to view.

"Good-morning, Father Bernhardt!" cried Trafford from the roof. "You arrive at an opportune moment; her Majesty's lieges were getting troublesome. At first I contented myself with snow-balling them, but they turned nasty and I had to despatch an icicle. I am afraid one liege was rather hurt."

Bernhardt's smile widened as he took in the situation.

"A pity it wasn't Von Hügelweiler," he said. "But you'd better let me escort you to your rooms. For the moment you seem to have fallen out of favour with the *plebs*."

"I fear so," replied the American, "and had it not been for good Herr Krantz, I might have fared badly at the hands of these gentlemen."

"Herr Krantz shall be rewarded," said Bernhardt. "His loyalty is well known and appreciated in the highest quarter. And as for these 'gentlemen,' as you call them," he went on, turning to the mob, "I've a good mind to give them an experience of a cavalry charge in a narrow lane."

The suggestion was taken literally by the mob, and something of a panic began in the neighbourhood of the

steel-clad troopers. But Bernhardt checked the movement with a quick shout.

"Stop, you fools!" he cried, rising in his stirrups and letting his great voice ring out. "Stop, and listen to me before you go about your business—or your idling! What do you mean by this breach of the peace? Has there not been trouble enough in the city of late? Are you men or wolves, that you hunt a man through the streets, and pull down the doorway of a peaceful citizen?"

"He is a traitor!" cried one. "He freed Karl!" cried another, and a babel of tongues broke out in an eager flood of accusation.

For a moment Bernhardt let them speak. Then he raised his hand and won instant silence.

"He is not a traitor," he said with slow emphasis. "He rescued me from the Strafeburg. Was that the act of a traitor? Had it not been for this brave and resourceful American I should now be rotting in a dungeon, and you still beneath the yoke of Karl. It is true that Karl has fled to Weissheim, but that was a mistake due to no fault of Trafford's. And the fault, whosoever's it was, he will undo, for he accompanies me to Weissheim, sworn to win back the Marienkastel from the Queen's enemies."

The quiet force of his words carried conviction to his hearers. They feared the grim, black figure as a pack of dogs fears its master, but there was a certain canine affection in their debased regard. Bernhardt was a superior being, one whose word was law. They heard and believed, and even began to feel self-reproachful.

"For shame on you, men of Weidenbruck!" went on the ex-priest in upraised tones. "Shame on you, I say, compassing harm against the man who delivered you from tyranny! This loyal friend of mine, whose courage and craft you have just experienced to your own hurt, joins an expedition to Weissheim as my right-hand man. A foreigner, he endures hardships and dangers for your sake and that of your noble young Queen. 'Traitor,' you called him! Hero and liberator would be better titles, I think, for such as he. With his help there is no fear but that we shall capture Weissheim from our enemies, and bring back Karl a prisoner to the capital. What reward will you have then for Trafford, the deliverer? Will you hunt him through your streets like a mad dog? Or will you strew garlands in his path, acclaim him from your housetops —aye, and give him the highest in your land to wife!"

Assuredly if the power of words is a wonderful thing, the power of personality is infinitely greater. Bernhardt had spoken with a certain ready eloquence, a certain skill of pleading in his client's cause; but another might have spoken with twice his skill and twice his oratory, and have failed completely. It was not that he followed the temper of the mob and adapted himself to their moods; rather, he made their moods for them, and used them to his own sweet will. When he reasoned they followed and were convinced, when he lashed they cringed, when he reproached they suffered agonies of shame; and at the end he raised their enthusiasm for the object of their late malice, with the ease of a consummate master of men, and his last ques-

tion was met with a ringing cry of "Long live the American! Long live Gloria of Grimland!" The ex-priest's smile was more of a sneer than anything—so cheap did he hold his triumph over the flaccid minds of the shifty horde; but his eye wandered to the roof where Trafford stood, shovel in hand, cheering himself and his secretly-married wife.

"We will escort you to your hotel," Bernhardt called out.

"It is not necessary," replied the American. "Bernhardt the Magician has effected my metamorphosis—he has changed me from a fox to a lion."

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE "BOB" RUN

In the far north of Grimland, seemingly secure in its snow-blocked passes and its improvised fortifications, the mountain town of Weissheim basked serenely in the unclouded sunshine of its exalted plateau. The life of the place went on, little affected outwardly by the rude shocks of a revolution that had unseated a dynasty at Weidenbruck, and incidentally horrified the sober-minded people of Europe. The railway was cut that connected Weissheim with the capital, and the telegraph wires were drooping, limp and useless, from their stark poles. The foreign contingent,—the English and American visitors of the "Pariserhof,"—pursued their life of unadulterated pleasure-seeking as thoroughly and unconcernedly as was their wont. Each morning found the curling rink well filled with knickerbockered mortals, bearing brooms, and hurling granite bowls over the perfect ice, and using weird expressions of Scottish origin tempered with Anglo-Saxon profanity. The snows of the hillsides were scarred with the double-tracked impressions of innumerable ski-runners, and the great toboggan run—the Kastel run—found its daily complement of votaries for its dangerous attractions. Each night the thermometer showed its zero frost, and each day the winter sun proclaimed its potency with no uncertain ray. Nature

was as serenely unconscious of politics as the guests of the Pariserhof were of the series of fogs that was at that time choking the streets of London with obfuscating blackness. This winter, indeed, was singularly like other winters at this ideal resort of athletic and convalescent humanity. It is true that horribile tales of rioting and violence had come through from Weidenbrück,—but similar reports had been transmitted many times previously,—and if the present rumours were rather more highly-coloured and substantial than heretofore, that was no reason why able-bodied men and women should not skate and ski, and play innumerable rubbers of bridge over cups of hot chocolate and cream-stuffed *éclairs au café*. It was true that bands of swarthy men in uniform, and armed with shovels, were perpetually throwing up snow-works on the surrounding bluffs, but they respected the skating-rinks and the toboggan-runs—which was all the visitors cared about. Moreover, they furnished rather a picturesque note as they dragged their grim pieces of ordnance over the steep snow slopes, and slowly hauled them into position in the aforementioned snow-works. What the guests of the Pariserhof failed to appreciate was, that a miracle was taking place. Weissheim was loyal! Weissheim,—for years the home of sedition and intrigue,—was all for Karl! Just as in the days of his prosperity it had turned against him, so now in the hour of his discomfiture it rallied to him as one man. The troubles of 1904 had taught the good Weissheimers that they had a man for a Sovereign, that the tall, good-natured, sunburnt gentleman in spectacles had a

hard fist inside his fur-lined gloves, and a stout heart under his Jäger cardigan. And the fact that Weidenbruck had cast him out was a good enough reason for their taking him in. The men of the mountain despised the dwellers of the plain. Rough, cruel, mutable as they were, there were still certain primitive virtues among the hardy hill-folk, and when one day Karl and the ever-popular Saunders turned up unexpectedly at Weissheim with their tale of woe, they let loose an enthusiasm that had never yet been accorded to Grimland's legitimate Sovereign. So, contrary to his fears, Meyer's task had been an easy one. . A more than capable engineer, he soon put the place on as sound a footing of defence as shovel and energy directed by German book-lore and Jewish brains could put it. Within a week of his arrival the whole plateau was secure in its well-planned redoubts and in the excellent temper of the civil and military population.

On the twentieth of January, eight days after the King's arrival, the race for the Cobham Cup took place on the bob-sleigh run. For this event bob-sleigh crews had foregathered from far and near, for the Weissheim "bob" run is acknowledged to be the fastest, the most difficult, and the most sporting in the world. A bob-sleigh,—let me explain for the benefit of the uninitiated,—is a very long toboggan capable of holding half a dozen persons. Unlike an ordinary toboggan, it is steered from the front by ropes, or, in the most up-to-date "bobs," by a wheel. The rearmost man manipulates a brake with a lever on either hand, and he awaits the commands of the steersman, who sees the

curves coming and realises when the pace must be checked to avert disaster. Originally, the "bobbing" was done along the high road, but this was so dangerous to horse-sleighs and pedestrians, and resulted in such fearful accidents, that a special track was constructed every winter, avoiding the town and ultimately joining the highway somewhere near Riefinsdorf. The winning-post was now at this junction, but for ordinary pleasure "bobbing," crews sometimes continued their course along the road itself, the constant declivity permitting the craft to travel at a great speed almost as far as Wallen, ten miles distant, or by branching to the left, to descend the Rylvio Pass into Austria. The difficulty of dragging the "bob" back made these distant expeditions events of some rarity, and, indeed, the first part of the course was so much more exciting than the roadway, that it was mainly on this portion that practising for the cup took place.

Imagine a track some six feet in width, formed of snow turned to ice by the process of constant watering, and so smooth and slippery that a burnished mirror would be rough and dull in comparison. Imagine this track inclined at a steep angle, walled in on both sides with low ice-banks, and trailing a long and sinuous course for a length of over a mile! Here we have the potentialities of speed when we remember that racing "bobs" are just low frameworks of wood whose steel runners glide over the polished track with as little friction as a flash of lightning traversing a thunder-cloud. When we add that the bends of the course are sharp, and often flanked by sheer precipices, and that

to negotiate these bends at high speed requires the greatest nerve and skill for all concerned, it is hardly necessary to add that the sport is one which appeals to wandering foreigners in search of sensations.

"It is a pity you have not got a crew," said Karl to Saunders, who, with his wife, General Meyer, and Frau von Bilderbaum, were seated in a wooden shelter erected at one of the most exciting bends of the course. "With your skill at the brake and Mrs. Saunders' skill at the wheel, you would have stood a fine chance of securing Lady Cobham's trophy."

"It is always a pity when politics interfere with sport," replied Saunders. "We manage these things better in England. When the shooting season commences politicians take a rest."

"Here," said Meyer, "the shooting season commences when the politicians are most active. Only we don't shoot grouse in Grimland—only kings and councillors."

Karl laughed.

"I should like to have seen Saunders take his crew down the run in approved style," he said; "I'd have wagered my forest lands to a frost-bite that he'd have done the best time."

"I should have liked nothing better," said Saunders, "but it is impossible to do oneself credit without practice. And I have been busy in other ways: I have been studying Meyer's treatise on Winter War, and I am not sure that the possibilities it holds forth are not more exhilarating even than the competition for Lady Cobham's cup."

"We are likely to have that statement verified, if what I hear is true," said the Commander-in-Chief quietly.

"And what you hear generally *is* true," muttered Karl.

"In this case I have no doubts," said Meyer. "A large military expedition left Weidenbruck the day before yesterday; its destination and object are not difficult to surmise."

"I am glad," said Frau von Bilderbaum truculently. "If blows are to be struck, the sooner the better; we are ready for them."

There was a sound of cheering from the direction of the starting point, signifying that the first crew was launched on its downward course.

It was morning—10.30 a. m., to be precise—for the race had to be run before the sun's power waxed hot enough to affect the surface of the track. And the scene was a gay one: blue and white flags were flying from poles at every hundred yards of the course, and from the crowded stands erected at the several points of vantage.

And the day was a typical Weissheim day: the sky was of a deep and ever-deepening blue. Not a breath of air stirred over the snow-veiled face of the country. The sun had risen above the shoulder of the mighty Klauigberg, and had turned the myriad crystals into a sparkling ocean of unbelievable whiteness. To draw breath was to fill one's lungs with perfect air and one's heart with ecstasy. To gaze at the shimmering panorama of towering peaks and snowy

buttresses was to behold the finest view in central Europe.

"Here they come!" ejaculated Karl excitedly, as a "bob" came into view, accompanied by a slight scraping sound, as the runners slithered over the adamantine track.

All held their breath, for the speed of the descending craft was absolutely terrifying. At the prow was a goggled figure in a white sweater, with a red dragon—the badge of his crew—worked on his chest. Behind him was a young girl, and behind her again four men, all similarly attired. With the exception of the steersman, who crouched forward,—a tense thing of staring eyes and straining muscles,—all were leaning back as far as possible to minimise wind pressure.

"Too fast!" was Saunders' comment.

Suddenly, in response to a hoarse cry from the steersman, the crew swung their bodies to the left and simultaneously flung out their arms in the same direction. The manœuvre was designed to bring the "bob" round the corner without checking the pace by applying the brake. The result was unsatisfactory. The prow of the "bob" struck the counter-bank violently, there was a gasp from a hundred throats, and a feathery cloud of snow rose, in which the limbs of half a dozen human beings were whirling in an intricate and inextricable confusion. No one, fortunately, was damaged, and in a few seconds the crew had sorted themselves and resumed their chequered career.

"Heroism and no brake!" muttered Karl. "How like our friend the American!"

" May his fall be as harmless!" said Saunders.
Frau Bilderbaum snorted.

" I should like to see him go over the precipice!" she exclaimed.

" You probably will—metaphorically speaking," said Meyer. " He is accompanying this expedition against us, and he has outwitted me twice."

A minute later another " bob " was making its nerve-shattering descent of the lightning run. This time its crew,—a well-drilled sextet in blue jerseys bearing the facetious badge of a tortoise,—swept round the dangerous bend without mishap.

" Well done, Miss Reeve-Thompson!" cried Mrs. Saunders, naming the lady who was steering the successful craft.

" That's done me good," sighed Karl in a note of satisfaction. " God's sky and the best of sports! Clean snow and the champagne air of Weissheim, and what care I for the rabble of the plains."

And so the morning wore on, with cheers for the skilful, gasps for the rash, and murmurs of pity for the unfortunate. There were more spills, of course, but fortunately no disasters of magnitude, and at midday the great competition was over. The "times" were added up and checked, and ultimately Miss Reeve-Thompson's crew were adjudged the winners, and accompanied by a cheering throng they received the cup from Lady Cobham at the Pariserhof.

The royal party waited till the crowd of onlookers had dispersed, and then wended their way back to the Brunvarad—the Winter Palace—on foot. As they

followed the track that bordered the run they fell in with General von Bilderbaum, struggling up the hill in a great grey overcoat, very moist and red of face.

"Well," said Karl, "how are the new forts looking?"

"Very workmanlike, sire. We have got two new quick-firers on to the south escarpment of redoubt A, and some old but serviceable *mitraileuses* in position in the long fosse between redoubts C and D."

"Excellent," drawled Meyer. "And our dear, loyal gunners—are they continuing to make good practice at the ice-targets?"

"I am sorry for anything they get sight of within two kilometres," responded the General.

"I am well served," said Karl. "Herr Saunders here has developed into a student of minor tactics, and I fancy would handle a brigade as well as a Moltke or a Kuroki."

At this moment they reached the point of the path where it crosses the bob-sleigh run, and the races being over and the track closed, a wooden plank had been laid across the glassy surface to afford secure foothold. The men halted to allow the ladies,—Mrs. Saunders and Frau Generalin von Bilderbaum,—to pass first. But the latter,—a lady, as the reader knows, of somewhat egregious proportions,—was not gifted by nature with a rapid gait through trampled snow. Holding high her green skirt, and planting her cumbrous snow-boots with deliberate precision, she advanced puffing and panting like a mountain engine in a snow-drift. Before, however, she had come up with the others, a strange man accosted the royal party from the opposite

direction. The individual in question was wearing skis, and looked fatigued and travel-stained, as though he had come fast and far. A black slouch hat was pressed over his forehead, and it was not till he was quite close that Karl and his companions recognised the features as those of Von Hügelweiler.

The Captain's salutation was as abrupt as his appearance.

"Hail! King of half a country," he said.

Quietly, swiftly, and without ostentation, Saunders and Meyer covered the newcomer with their revolvers.

"Hands up when you speak to his Majesty," said the latter.

Von Hügelweiler dropped his ski-ing pole and held up his hands.

"I have a weapon in my breast," he said, "but it is not for any here."

Meyer quietly inserted his hand into the Captain's breast pocket, and drew out a revolver. It was of the Grimland army pattern, and loaded in all its chambers. He swiftly extracted the cartridges and transferred them to his own person, and then,—having satisfied himself that the Captain had no further munitions of war,—replaced the unloaded weapon in its original position.

"Now you may talk without the inconvenience of holding your hands in that fatiguing posture," he said.
"What is it?"

"I come from Weidenbruck," said Von Hügelweiler, "and I bring news. The day before yesterday an expedition left the capital for Weissheim."

Meyer nodded.

"That is so," he agreed; "we get to know things, even in this charmingly remote district. Still, details are always agreeable. What does the force consist of?"

"The whole brigade of Guards, two battalions of Guides, and the Kurdeburg Sharpshooters."

"They do me honour," said the King. "But they will find the railway somewhat disorganised. You see, we have dynamited the principal viaducts, to say nothing of the two-mile tunnel under the Kahberg—and these things are not easy to repair when the snow is down."

"The railway is open as far as Eselbruck," the Captain returned, "and from thence they will come over the passes on skis. They will come quicker than they would in the summer."

"That is true enough," agreed Meyer. "And who is in command of this imposing force?"

"Bernhardt."

"Indeed! And the second in command?"

"A cursed American.

Meyer smiled.

"That describes Herr Trafford admirably," he said. "But how about yourself, Von Hügelweiler? How is it you are not occupying a distinguished position in this amiable field-force?"

"Because there are limits even to my dishonour," retorted Von Hügelweiler fiercely. "In transferring my services from his Majesty King Karl to her Majesty Queen Gloria, I knew I was sinking, but I

only learned a little while ago to what great depths."

"You are the man who was sent to hold the Strafeburg for me," said Karl sternly, "and who handed it over to the mob rather than risk your skin."

"I did not yield to fear," retorted the Captain, turning almost savagely on his sovereign. "I yielded to an even more odious thing—passion. The Princess pleaded with me, balancing her woman's grace against my loyalty. I could face the fury of the multitude, but I succumbed to the blandishments of a wanton!"

The word drew an exclamation of surprise and indignation from Saunders.

"And you had your reward!" he said with a sneer.

"Aye, I have had my reward," was the bitter answer. "Love such as mine always has its reward. I learned who it was upon whom the fickle Gloria had bestowed her worthless heart. Who was it, do you think? A nobleman, a great soldier, a Prince? No! She was conducting a guilty intrigue with the *schweinhund* Trafford—the man who betrayed his party by immuring the enemy in a spikeless *Eisenmädchen*.

"Yes, that's true enough," said Karl. "The *schweinhund* Trafford, as you call him, possesses some rudimentary ideas of humanity, despite his absurd predilection for anarchy. I may remember that when my time comes."

"It was an act of folly and weakness," said the Captain recklessly, "an act of treachery to the side he had espoused. As soon as I heard of it I hastened to Bernhardt's chambers with the news."

"And he said?" asked Karl.

"He said he loved and hated you," replied the Captain.

Karl nodded thoughtfully.

"I believe that expresses his mental attitude towards me very well," he said.

"It was the mad paradox of an *absintheur*," Von Hügelweiler interrupted. "He was half drunk and wholly dangerous, and I left him. I roused the people against Trafford, but the scoundrel defended himself cunningly, and in the end the devil-ridden Bernhardt turned up and rescued him with a troop of Dragoons."

"And why are you here?" asked General Bilderbaum.

"For one thing, there are two hundred *kronen* on my head in Weidenbruck," replied Von Hügelweiler. "That makes the place unhealthy. Neither do I desire to serve that delightful trinity, the wanton Queen, the dipsomaniac priest, and the *verdomte* American."

"But why come here?" persisted Bilderbaum, growing, if possible, still redder in the face.

Von Hügelweiler ignored the speaker, and turned to Karl.

"I have no claim on your trust," he said to his late sovereign, "no claim on your mercy—but my services may be useful. I ask no high command, I merely crave to be put somewhere in the firing-line, where I can put a bullet into the heart of the cursed American."

A silence followed this savage request. Then Karl turned to General Bilderbaum.

"What say you, General?" he asked. "Do you like the look of your new recruit?"

"No, sire," said the old soldier bluntly. "I have some blackguards in my command, but no double-dyed traitor such as this."

"What!" Von Hügelweiler's nerves,—never well under control,—were raw and ragged from his recent bitter experience, and by no means improved by the forced and hasty journey he had undertaken to Weissheim. With a cry of rage and indignation he swung round on the plain-spoken old General, maddened at the insult, and raising his fist as though to avenge it with a blow. But, as on a previous occasion, the General's wife was near at hand to protect the sacred person of her lord and master. Boiling with indignation, she hurled her ample person at the mutinous captain. Von Hügelweiler gave ground—he would have been a Samson had he not done so. And he stepped, not on to the snow, not on to the plank that crossed the run, but on to the surface of the bob-sleigh track itself. He might have trodden on a cloud or a trembling bog for all the foothold it afforded, and with a cry he fell, the Frau von Bilderbaum falling heavily and incontinently on him. Hands were stretched out, but too late. Before the General could clutch the skirt of his devoted partner, the ill-assorted pair,—struggling, writhing, uttering noises of wrath and fear,—had commenced the descent of the "bob" run. Nothing could stop their downward progress. Swifter and swifter the terrified twain glided, impotent hands clutched at the frictionless banks, and impotent heels

were pressed fiercely and fruitlessly on to the glassy surface of the track. Down they went, the Captain struggling and swearing, the woman struggling and bellowing. The pace grew. They became disengaged. Von Hügelweiler slithered swiftly on his side, Frau von Bilderbaum rotated slowly in a sitting posture, descending with ever-growing momentum. Up a banked curve she swung, fat arms were raised frantically, a roar of pathetic discomfort shook the frosty air, and the devoted woman disappeared from view round a bend of the track.

Much of the colour had left General Bilderbaum's face. No one laughed, for the ludicrous mishap might well be a prelude to a serious, even fatal, accident. Saunders climbed up a high mound of piled snow, from which the further bends of the track might be visible.

"There are some men at work lower down sweeping the course," he said, speaking clearly for all to hear. "They have heard the cries and they are preparing to stop them. Two have put their brooms across the track—but the speed is gathering. They have stopped her—no! the impetus was too great—the sweepers are rolling backwards in the snow. Wait! the pace is checked—others are helping. They've got her. Now—ah! Hügelweiler's on the top of them! What a collision! She's up, unhurt! It's all right, General; your good lady is safe and sound of limb. She's had a shaking, but her nerves are good, or I'm no judge of physiology. Go down and look after her."

"Aye, and after Hügelweiler, too," spluttered the veteran. "I've a heavy reckoning with that young

scoundrel that will take some paying, or I'm not the son of Karl Bilderbaum the Fierce."

"I wonder,"—said Karl, as soon as General Bilderbaum had left to recover his hapless spouse,—“I wonder whether this man Von Hügelweiler might not prove a valuable addition to our force. He seems to have the enemy's discomfiture, if not our interests, very much at heart.”

“Where would you put him?” asked Saunders.

“I should put him where David put Uriah the Hittite,” said Meyer. “Where he has himself asked to be put—in the firing line.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

RIVAL INFLUENCES

VON HUGELWEILER had spoken true when he said that the expedition had started against Weissheim. Two days after Trafford had so narrowly escaped the violence of the Weidenbruck mob the various regiments were entrained at the great terminus in the Bahnhofstrasse. The sight of men being despatched to kill their fellow-men always rouses enthusiasm in the human breast, and there was abundance of flaunting banners, martial melody, and sounding cheers from the stay-at-homes. And in the rolling of drums and the reverberation of cheers Gloria herself seemed to have forgotten her original prejudice against the campaign. And as the engine screeched and the royal train, decked with the green and yellow bunting of her House, moved slowly from the station, she felt a Queen going forth to re-conquer a rebellious province, a just instrument of picturesque vengeance, rather than the player of the unwelcome rôle of blood-guilty adventuress. She put her head out of the window, and bowed and smiled and waved her hand, a thing of girlish excitement with the minutest appreciation of the underlying grimness of the situation.

That day they steamed to Eselbruck. At this point the railway was cut. The great stone viaduct that spanned the deep ravine was a thing of shattered piers and broken arches, an interesting problem for the en-

gineer, and an object-lesson in the effective use of detonating cartridges. At this point, therefore, the units were derailed, a dépôt formed, and on the next morning the whole force,—shod with skis and in full marching order,—set itself in motion towards Weissheim. During the march Trafford neither saw nor heard from Gloria. He was not unhappy. The fine air, the healthy exercise, the splendid uplands through which they were passing, won him to a mood of strong content. Something had lit a fire in his heart that no wind of disfavour or adversity could extinguish. He knew that he was a living man again, moving among creatures of flesh and blood; not a spiritless mechanism in a world of automata. He had seen, or fancied he had seen, a spark of human love in the young Queen's heart, and that spark he swore to kindle into flame by deeds of reckless heroism. And the great energy that was his birthright,—stimulated to its highest capacity by the bracing air of the snow-clad passes and the extraordinary beauty of the land,—filled his spirit with a vast and comforting hopefulness.

In the course of the afternoon he found Bernhardt by his side. Trafford began to thank him for his rescue from the mob, but Bernhardt interrupted him.

“I know about your secret marriage,” he said, “and though I think it folly, it is the sort of folly I admire. Von Hügelweiler told me about it. To the people he told another story,—a less respectable story without ring or sacrament.”

“So I gather. But I can fight calumny as I can fight other enemies of my Queen.”

Bernhardt nodded approvingly.

"They breed men in your country," he said, and then asked: "Are you tired?"

"It is impossible to be tired in such air," was the reply.

"Ski-running is a new sport to you, and you are in love."

Trafford laughed lightly.

"I am in love with Grimland," he said. "Weidenbruck is a villainous place; but these gorgeous mountains, with their great, sombre forests and limitless snow-fields, make up a picture I shall never forget. I should like to be king of such a country."

"One never knows," said Bernhardt. "A great and striking victory, and your dream may be realised. But for the present, remember that you are a soldier, not a consort. Our friend Von Hügelweiler has an evil tongue, and he has spread cruel slanders about you and the Queen. Evil things win quick credence in Grimland, and the only way to give them the lie is for you and Gloria to see nothing of each other at present."

"That is a little rough on a newly-married man."

"Your marriage is nothing. The Grimlander, who is fickleness personified,—and who would like a change of dynasty once a week,—is never a Republican. He would not tolerate the idea of his sovereign mating with a commoner. The only possible chance of such a step being accepted is for you to do something quite out of the ordinary in this campaign. It will hardly be wise even then—but we might chance it."

"I believe in fate," said Trafford stubbornly.

"Comfort yourself your own way," said Bernhardt. "I, for my part, wish you well. There is a dash of the devil about you that wins my best wishes. But I have no further time to waste discussing your affairs. I am wanted here, there, and everywhere, and the time is one of war, not of love. Only, remember my command, my advice if you prefer it; keep your mind fixed on your military duties, and avoid her gracious Majesty Gloria as you would the plague."

That night they encamped at Schafers-stadt—a quaint old town lying in a sunless valley between precipitous hills. Next day they started early, reaching Wallen, a mountain village within easy striking distance of Weissheim, shortly after sunset. Here accommodation was somehow found for the considerable force under Bernhardt's command. Shelter had to be obtained for all, for to sleep out of doors at such an altitude during the winter months meant awakening in another world. Food had also to be provided on a large scale, for the force was what is called a "flying column"; that is to say, it was proceeding across country in the most direct line to its objective, and not relying on road or railway for a continuance of supplies.

The only transport accompanying the force was of a grimmer nature. A number of pieces of ordnance were being conveyed on flat-bottomed sleighs, specially constructed for the purpose. And these had to be drawn, with infinite labour, by men on skis, for the way lay over a countryside many feet deep in snow, and

horses would have been absolutely useless for such a purpose. Trafford, therefore, was busy on his arrival unearthing cheeses and loaves, wine-casks and other fascinating objects, from the cellars of the more or less hospitable Walleners. Whilst so employed he was approached by a private of the Guards with a note.

“Come to the big house in the Market Square—the one with the carved escutcheon over the door—at 6.30, and I will give you dinner.—Gloria R.”

“I will write an answer,” said Trafford.

“There is no answer, Excellency,” said the man, and with a salute he was gone.

Trafford rubbed his hand thoughtfully up and down the back of his neck. Bernhardt had been quite definite in his command to him not to see the Queen, and though the order was little to his liking, he approved its prudence. But the letter in his hand was also a command, and it came from a higher source than even Bernhardt’s dictum.

Accordingly, at half-past six he presented himself at a big balconied house in the Market Square. A simple meal was spread for two in the dining-room,—a low pitched apartment panelled from floor to ceiling in dark pine, and garnished with a wealth of cumbrous, antique furniture.

He waited alone for a few moments, cheered by a most appetising and savoury odour of cooking, and then Gloria entered, smiling, cordial, eminently composed.

"I am so glad you have come," she began.

He took her outstretched hand and kissed it.

"I am a soldier, and I obey," he said.

"When it pleases you," she laughed. "And I hope it does please you to dine tête-à-tête with me."

"I can conceive no greater felicity."

"None?"

"None," he answered. "I have the excitement of a military campaign, my eyes are continually feasted with magnificent scenery, and my lungs with matchless air. Then, on the top of a day of most exhilarating exercise comes an invitation from the lady who is my wife on paper, and whom I have sworn to make my wife in the sight of all men."

Gloria looked him fully in the face and pressed a small hand-bell that reposed on the table at her side.

"Gaspar," she said to the orderly who had entered, "bring in the dinner. You know that our friend Bernhardt has forbidden us to meet," Gloria continued, after a dish of *jungfernbraten*—roast pork and juniper berries—had been set before them.

"I know," said Trafford, "and he was right."

"Why?"

Trafford hesitated.

"Von Hügelweiler seems to have coupled our names in an unpleasant manner," he said at length.

Gloria flushed.

"Then you should not have come," she said.

"You gave me no option. As your husband I might have refused. As your officer I had to obey."

"You might have exercised your discretion."

"I might if I had any," he replied. "But I am a most indiscreet man. To-morrow, so I understand, I am going into action. I may win fame or I may be shot through the head. As the latter alternative is not unlikely, I am anxious to spend what may be my last evening on earth with the one woman whom I really——"

A forcible ring from Gloria interrupted the sentence's conclusion.

"Gaspar, fill this gentleman's glass. As you were remarking, Captain, Grimland is a very beautiful country."

"It is a very cold country," Trafford growled, plunging his fork into the steaming viands.

"To-morrow night I shall be sleeping in my ancestral home—the Marienkastel," Gloria pursued, as the orderly withdrew. "It is a fine old place, and Karl forfeited it when my father failed to carry out his projects in 1904."

"That is the place you wish me to win back for you?"

"If you will be so kind?"

"And suppose I am killed in the process, will you think kindly of me?"

"Very."

The callousness of the affirmation horrified him.

"I believe you were right when you said you had no heart!" he cried indignantly.

"That is what I want you to believe," she returned calmly.

"And that if I am killed," he went on bitterly,

"you will welcome the termination of an impossible situation."

Gloria gave an almost imperceptible shrug.

"You keep harping on death," she protested, "surely you are not afraid?"

He turned fiercely on her, but restrained his voice to a level tone.

"From what you know of me," he asked, "am I the sort of man who is likely to be afraid?"

"No," she admitted readily. "The night of the revolution you were heroism personified. Also I have heard of your exploit in Herr Krantz's wine-shop, and it—it sounded very typical of you."

"Thank you," he said, meeting her gaze; and an instant later, he added: "There is no such thing as fear in the world for me."

"Why?" she asked.

He answered her question with a reckless bang on the table.

"Because I have lived!" he cried. "If a bullet finds its way to my heart it will have warm lodging. I am a happy man, and my happiness stands high above the accidents of life and death. Eternity has no terrors but solitude, and for me there will never be such a thing as solitude again, because I have met my second self."

A hand was stretched out towards the bell, but Trafford intercepted it, and the bell was swept off the table on to the floor.

Gloria rose with flashing eyes.

"I asked you here in a spirit of camaraderie," she said haughtily. "Because I owe much to you and

am conscious of the debt, I risked angering Bernhardt and smirching my own fair name. But you abuse my confidence. You know, as I know, that the present is no time for love-making. And yet——” She stopped abruptly, for Trafford had risen, and, picking up the bell, he put it on the table before her.

“Ring,” he said.

“Can I not trust you?”

“No!” he retorted. “You gave me the right to love you, not by your promise to go through the ceremony of marriage with me, not by the fulfilment of that promise, but by a certain light that shone in your eyes for a few brief seconds in the chapel of the Neptunburg. I am exercising that right to-night.”

She drew in her breath sharply.

“You said just now that I was heartless,” she said.

“That is the usual lover’s lie,” he retorted; “the reproach that is only justified by its manifest untruth. But I am a gentleman, as you vaguely surmise, and I will not persist in an attention which is unwelcome to you. I came to make an appeal. You have but to command, and I will leave without another word.”

“What is the appeal?”

“Do you wish me to make it?” he countered.

“You have said so much you had best go on.”

Trafford drew back the curtain of the mullioned window and gazed at the shining pageantry of the frosty skies. For a full minute he stood gazing, and then he dropped the tapestry and faced his royal hostess.

“I said I was content with things as they are,” he

began, "and to a point that is so, for they are better than they might have been. But with the eye of faith I see something nobler than this struggle for a kingdom we have no right to possess. Something has made me wise these past few days: something has taught me that the love of excitement can be very cruel, and that the harrying of a brave man is not necessarily a more elevating sport than bull-baiting."

"You wish me to abandon this expedition against Karl?"

"Oh, it is an absurd, impossible demand, I know," he said, "and I don't ask you for a moment to consider it. There are a hundred reasons why we should go on, and there is only one reason why we should not; and that reason does not seem to weigh with you at all. But I am a madman, a visionary, and, like Bernhardt, I see things. And in my hallucinations I see a woman who is Queen, not of Grimland, but of an even more delectable country. And the woman I see has but one subject, and she is content with him alone, because her sway over him is so paramount."

Gloria stood very, very still. Only her fingers moved as they plucked the fur trimming of her dress.

"If I asked you to give up Grimland and fly with me to America, would you do it?" he cried passionately.

"No—but I should like to hear you ask it." A smile, the slowest smile that ever was, bent the extreme corners of the fascinating lips, and ultimately broke in a burst of sunshine illuminating the whole face. Its arrival found him by her side, his hand on her arm,

and a look in his eyes that sought for something with an almost pathetic intensity.

"I do ask you to come to America with me," he said. "Will you come—come to New York, the great, bright city, where the people do not do the horrible things they do in Grimland and other out-of-the-way corners of Europe?" He waited a moment, and then added: "Of course, we shall always keep this beautiful country in our hearts—a land of rocky spires and splintered crags, a land of swelling snow-fields and amazingly blue skies; a land where the air is sweet and keen and pine-laden, and the face of Nature stands bold and true, crisp-cut from the chisel of the Master-mason."

There was no answer. His hand trembled on her arm like a vibrant note of interrogation; his eyes strained to catch the light he longed for, the light he had seen, or fancied he had seen, in the gloom of the Chapel Royal.

"Will you come?" he breathed; and for a pregnant second the world of things material rolled back from his consciousness, and left him standing alone in space with his fate. For the strange brain was playing tricks with him,—as big, uncontrolled brains do with impulsive, ill-balanced people. His five senses were in abeyance, or warped beyond all present usefulness. He saw a pair of eyes as points of light in a world of darkness, but all sense of reality had utterly deserted him. He was as he had been in the Chapel Royal when his bride had made her hesitating avowal of a half-passion. A sheet of flame seemed to be passing.

through his body, a roseate glow suffused his vision ; he never realised that he was uttering a beloved name in a voice of thunder and grasping a beloved object with no little strength. But ecstatic entrancements, however subliminal, yield ultimately to rude physical shocks, and dimly and slowly the world of dreams vanished and he became conscious that someone was hitting him violently on the back. Turning round with half-dazed eyes, he found himself confronted with the stern lineaments of Father Bernhardt. The ex-priest, clad in a military overcoat and high leggings, and powdered with still unmelted snow, carried mingled wrath and astonishment in his countenance.

“ *Sunde und Siechheit!* ” he cried. “ Are you, too, an *absintheur*, Captain Trafford? ”

For the moment Trafford had not the vaguest idea what an *absintheur* might be, but he replied vaguely in the negative.

Bernhardt uttered an oath.

“ I called you three times by name,” he said, “ and I struck you three times on the back before you would condescend to pay me any attention.”

“ I apologise,” said Trafford; “ I was thinking of other things.”

“ You were in a delirium,” retorted Bernhardt. “ The fiend of Tobit——”

“ Oh, hang the fiend of Tobit! ” interrupted Trafford hotly. “ I may be a lunatic, Bernhardt, but I’m a healthy-minded lunatic, if there is such a thing. I was making love, and we’ll leave it at that, if you please, and drop all talk of delirium and fiends.”

"I was finding an excuse for you."

"I don't need one, thank you." Trafford, as is the way with interrupted lovers, was in an irritable mood, and being so did not notice that Bernhardt was really angry.

"Indeed you do!" retorted the ex-priest. "I forbade you expressly to see the Queen, and I find you dining alone with her, and making violent love to her in addition."

"I received a command to dine."

"And a command to make love?" sneered Bernhardt.

"That is my affair."

Bernhardt turned from the irate American to the confused Gloria, and there was little deference in his regard.

"Your Majesty does not value your reputation too highly," he said. "As long as you play at being a maid it is as well to act like a maid."

"My reputation can look after itself," she retorted with dignity.

"We are five thousand feet above sea level," put in Trafford, "and at least two thousand above the level of perpetual convention. What was a wise precaution at Weidenbruck becomes sheer timidity at Wallen. But if you still think my presence is infectious to the Queen's honour, I will withdraw. The question I came to ask has been answered, and answered well."

Bernhardt turned a pair of piercing eyes on the intrepid American. Trafford met the look without flinching.

"You are a very strange person, Herr Trafford," said the ex-priest slowly; "you are not afraid of me. I believe you and Saunders are the only two men in Grimland who are capable of standing up to me in my wrath. But tell me before you go, what was this question you put and what was its answer."

"I asked her Majesty if she wished to continue this expedition against Karl, and she answered, 'No.'"

"She answered 'No!'" Bernhardt gasped.

"If you do not believe me, ask her yourself."

Again Bernhardt turned to the young Queen.

"Is it true?" he demanded.

Gloria passed her hand across her forehead, as if she was just recovering from a condition of unconsciousness. When she spoke it was in jerky, consequent sentences.

"Karl is a brave man; he is not a bad man. It is cruel to harry people—loyal, brave people. He is the lawful sovereign of Grimland. I don't wish to cause suffering. I——"

"There speaks a Schattenberg!" interrupted Bernhardt with a mocking laugh. "The man who killed your father is entrenched within two leagues of you. Your house, the historic Marienkastel, home of the Schattenbergs for centuries, is his appanage. You have six thousand men at your back to win you back your heritage; but the old, heroic fire is burning low, the fierce old blood is running thin—the Schattenbergs are bred out!"

The man's calculated scorn, his splendid insolence, filled Trafford with admiration; and it was plain that

his caustic speech was not without its effect on the sensitive Gloria. She seemed to be emerging from a stupor which still drugged her senses.

"I would like the Marienkastel," she conceded; "it is the home of my childhood; its walls are very dear to me. It should be mine by right."

"Say rather by might," retorted Bernhardt. "You like the Marienkastel, but you do not like the withering fire that decimates the storming party. Its walls are dear to you, but the forlorn hope, the scaling ladders, and the petard are abhorrent to your soul. You wish to possess, but the strong man armed is too forbidding a person to be ousted."

"If the expedition were against the Marienkastel——"

"It is against the Marienkastel," interrupted Bernhardt. "The Marienkastel is the key to the whole town. If we can hold it for half an hour we can dictate what terms we like."

"Dictate what terms we like!" Gloria repeated the last words of his sentence with eyes aflame. She was a Schattenberg again, ardent, ambitious, reckless. All trace of weakness had left her.

"And can we take it—can we hold it?" she went on in tones of eager inquiry.

Bernhardt stretched out his hand towards Trafford.

"There is the answer to your question," he said.

"You will capture the Marienkastel for me?" she asked, turning to her silent lover.

Trafford looked at the girl before him long and searchingly before answering.

"The Marienkastel is the key to Weissheim," he said at length; "it is also, it appears, the key to your heart. I thought there was a nearer way,—a better way. Yes," he went on, "I will capture the Marienkastel, or do all that a man can do to capture it, and then I will claim my reward."

"You shall have it," said Bernhardt; "I swear it."

"And I promise . . ." breathed Gloria.

Trafford nodded to himself.

"I am content," he said.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THE OPENING BARS

MR. AND MRS. SAUNDERS were having breakfast together in the pretty stone villa they had built for themselves at Weissheim, overlooking the Nonnensee. The view of the mountains beyond the lake, the exquisite expanse of snow, growing into sparkling life under the touch of the rising sun, furnished a prospect of sufficiently absorbing grandeur. But Saunders' eyes wandered only from an *omelette aux fines herbes* to a belated copy of the *Morning Post*. English newspapers had been scarce since the cutting of the railway, and the present specimen had reached its destination by a roundabout way through Vienna, and had cost exactly tenpence.

"What is the Government doing?" asked Mrs. Saunders, who took an interest in home politics.

"I don't know. When I am in this delightfully disorganised country the mild animosities of English party strife fill me with contempt. I was reading the 'Births, deaths, and marriages' just to prove to myself that there are natural tragedies and romances, even in the decently regulated areas of Bayswater and Mayfair."

"Is anyone we know mentioned?"

"By Jove!" ejaculated Saunders after a pause.

“ Well? ”

“ By Jove! ”

“ Please go on, Robert,” said Mrs. Saunders with pardonable impatience.

“ Angela Knox, that American girl, is——”

“ Well? ”

“ Is going to marry a grouse moor.”

“ Pray be explicit.”

“ Glengourlie—a little man in the Scots Guards. Eldest son of the Marquis of Stratheerie; ten thousand a year and the best half of Inverness-shire.”

Mrs. Saunders received this startling information with composure.

“ She’ll make a handsome peeress,” was her comment.

“ What about George Trafford? ” asked her husband.

“ Grimland is a country of short memories and swift changes,” said Mrs. Saunders. “ It converted you from a *blasé* bachelor to a happy husband; and it has converted George Trafford from a broken-hearted desperado to a lover of an usurping queen.”

“ Do you believe Von Hügelweiler’s tale? ” asked Saunders in surprise.

“ Yes, and no; I believe George has undoubtedly been fascinated by Gloria. With her beauty, high spirit, and fearless temperament, she was bound to attract him. Fresh from a recent disappointment—and lacking as he is at all times in all sense of proportion—he is quite capable of demanding her hand in marriage. But Gloria,—though she would like him well enough as a friend,—would not dream of stulti-

fying herself by marrying a plain American; still less would she stoop to the depths Von Hügelweiler hinted at."

"I am sorry about it all," said Saunders. "Nervy, with all his faults, is a lovable sort of scoundrel, and he had a pretty severe knock over *l'affaire Angela*. If Gloria is fooling him for her own purposes—as seems more than certain—it will leave him, spiritually and mentally, in a condition of pulp."

"You mean—"

"Oh, not exactly; for one thing, he's mad already. He's like a man on a free-wheel bicycle without a brake—all right on the level, but in the deuce of a fix if he begins to go downhill."

Mrs. Saunders looked thoughtful.

"There is a possibility that he may never live to be disillusioned," she said. "He is said to be accompanying this force against us, and he is not the sort of person to cultivate the art of taking cover. However, things will be settled one way or the other soon."

"Very soon," Saunders agreed. "Meyer's scouts report that the enemy encamped last night at Wallen; and they don't waste time there. Six thousand able-bodied men in a bracing climate eat a good deal—and Wallen is a small place with a limited supply of hams and maize. They will be here to-day or to-morrow."

Mrs. Saunders devoted her attention to the omelette which furnished their morning meal. She was a lady who had made a point of hiding her emotions, and the near prospect of her husband being in danger necessi-

tated a strong effort of control. It was some minutes before she spoke again.

"What are you going to do this morning?" she asked at length. "I should 'curl,' if I were you. You haven't 'sent down' a 'stone' for weeks, and I think a respite from your military preoccupations would do you good."

Saunders sighed regretfully, and stretched himself.

"There is a competition to-day," he replied; "Major Flannel's Cup, and I am not in for it. I may watch for a bit, but things are too critical now to admit of much leisure. You see, I've been told off to hold the Marienkastel, and our good friends the enemy may send us their visiting-cards at any minute."

"And can you hold the Marienkastel?" asked Mrs. Saunders.

Saunders smiled.

"I can hold it for a couple of hours," he replied, "which is all that Meyer requires of me. We are to put as many of the enemy out of action as we can, and then yield possession with a bad grace. After that we have a little surprise for them: a couple of concealed mortars, which will blow the historic old fabric and those inside it into several thousand fragments."

Mrs. Saunders suppressed a shudder.

"And are they sure to attack the Marienkastel?" she asked.

"Absolutely certain," he replied, "if they know the rudiments of military science. Besides, there are sentimental reasons for their doing so, for the old Schloss is the ancestral home of the Schattenbergs."

Mrs. Saunders was silent for a moment; then she spoke, hesitatingly, but with a forced calm.

"And will your position—be a very dangerous one?" she asked.

"Fairly so," he replied lightly. "You see, we shall have to bear the brunt of the main attack, and we shall hang on as long as we can. But it is in the evacuation that we shall probably lose most heavily."

Mrs. Saunders nodded sagely.

"And it is in the subsequent bombardment that the enemy will suffer most severely?" she inquired.

"Precisely. It will mean turning the fine old place into a shambles, but we must strike hard or not at all; and Karl's blood is up, as it was in 1904."

A deep, vibrant "boom" broke on their ears, and died with long-drawn echoes amid the encircling mountains.

"The enemy have sent their visiting-card!" said Mrs. Saunders.

Saunders rose, and stepped hurriedly out of the long window on to the balcony, his wife following. The former produced a pair of field-glasses, and critically regarded a puff of smoke that hung motionless in the still morning air to the extreme left of the panorama.

"Four-inch Creusot," he said laconically; "that means that redoubt A has found something to practise at—a feint attack, probably. I must go to my post in the Marienkastel. They'll have worked round there in a couple of hours, and then the serious business will begin."

Another sounding roar came pealing along the hill-sides, and then a veritable concert, as the other iron mouths took up the harsh music and shook the thin air with their stern melody.

From where they stood the actual operations of the attack were invisible by reason of the pine woods that clothed the plain in that direction. But there was much to see from the commanding site occupied by the Saunders' villa. The town itself,—with its circle of improvised forts,—lay considerably below them to the left. Companies of soldiers were painfully discernible defiling to the various points of defence assigned to them, and the blare of bugles rang shrilly through the strident chorus of the distant cannon. It was plain that the greatest activity prevailed, but an activity well-ordered, thought-out, and purposeful.

Meyer,—with all his unsoldierly distaste for personal danger,—was almost perfect as the general of a threatened city. Every detail had been thought out, every unit of the defence was ready at a moment's notice to take his appointed place.

Saunders turned his sweeping gaze to the right, and it lighted upon the private curling-rink belonging to Major Flannel's villa. He smiled, for the contest for the Flannel Cup had already begun, and was going on heedless of the stern symphony that was making the valleys echo with bursts of shattering sound.

A curling competition demands a whole-hearted absorption from its votaries, and takes little heed of battle, murder, and sudden death, provided the ice is 'een and in good order.

"What are you smiling at?" demanded Mrs. Saunders.

"British sense of proportion," he replied, and as he spoke a man on skis approached from the street below and called on him by name.

"Orders from the General, Excellency!"

Saunders took the note. It was a hurried scrawl in Meyer's handwriting:

"Proceed instantly on receipt of this to the Marienkastel. Hang on till they get within a hundred yards, then bolt for the abatis in the new cemetery!" Saunders read it aloud, and then turned to his wife.

"Farewell, dearest," he said simply. "When I have gone make your way to the Pariserhof. You will be perfectly safe there."

Mrs. Saunders hung speechless a moment in her husband's embrace. When she spoke it was apologetically, as one demanding a difficult favour.

"Robert," she pleaded, "should I be a great nuisance in the Marienkastel? I could tend the wounded—I might even——"

"To-day is a day of obedience and discipline," he interrupted with firm kindness. "I am ordered to the Marienkastel, you to the Pariserhof. Yours is the post of anxiety, mine of excitement. Man is selfish and woman patient—and so the latter always has to bear the crueler burden."

She bit her lip and nodded, and released herself from his embrace. Strong arms handed him his rifle, and cool, steady hands fastened the cartridge-belt around his waist.

"You know Karl entreated you not to take part in this stupid war," she said with the suspicion of a break in her voice. "Was it kind to me to refuse him?"

"It was infernally cruel," he replied. "Necessity generally is."

Again she nodded thoughtfully. He was right; he was bound to help Karl, but it needed a brave woman to admit the necessity. But Mrs. Saunders was no ordinary woman, and for a minute her hazel eyes fought hard and not unsuccessfully against the hot, pent stream that battled for an exit. For a moment she fought the unequal fight; then nature gained the day.

The tears won through, and the strong, supple form became a clinging thing of naked grief.

Saunders pressed the bowed head tenderly against his bosom, and intertwined his fingers lovingly in her hair.

"Good-bye, best beloved," he said. "And whatever comes, defeat or victory, the thrill of triumph or the darkness that is death, there will only be one vision before me—the cool, grey eyes that looked into my soul and found something there not wholly unworthy of a woman's love."

"God who gave you to me, protect you," she sobbed, "and teach me to live through to-day."

And as Saunders strode through the snow to the Marienkastel there was no fear in his heart; merely a great longing for the reunion which must come to loyal hearts—here or hereafter.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE PARLEY

THE Pariserhof, whither Mrs. Saunders betook herself at her husband's desire, was sufficiently safe, both from its situation and character, to form a rallying point for non-combatants of both sexes and diverse nationalities. From its upper stories an excellent view of the hostilities could be obtained, and in its cellars there was not only efficient shelter from chance missiles, but a considerable mitigation of the thunder of artillery. The latter apartments, therefore, were crowded with old ladies and young children, with a sprinkling of sensitive males who had come to Weissheim to recover nerve-tone rather than to listen to gun-fire. On the flat roof over the great dining-hall Mrs. Saunders was standing, field-glasses in hand, surveying the operations with a steady and critical gaze. Most often her glasses were directed towards the Marienkastel, against which the forces of the invading party were being gradually focussed; but no sound passed her lips, neither did the fine, white fingers that held the field-glasses twitch or tremble in the least degree. Hers was the curious, irrational pride that prefers to hide its suffering, though the suffering be doubled by the effort of concealment.

A few adventurous spirits had sallied forth to other points of vantage, where they could get a better, though less secure, view of the rare spectacle afforded

by the fateful day. But for once the curling-rink and skating-rink belonging to the hotel were deserted; for once the surface of the ice-runs was unscarred by the iron runners of innumerable toboggans. Only on Major Flannel's private rink,—not far from the Marienkastel itself,—the contest for the Flannel Cup was proceeding as though the day was a day of sport and not of war. The keenest curlers in Weissheim were there: "Skipper" Fraser, the sandy Scot, whose perky humour lent such spice and piquancy to the most tragic moments of the game; Major Flannel himself, roaring out his commands, reproaches, and encouragements in a voice which easily made itself heard through the growing din of battle; Strudwick, the gigantic American, who could always be relied on when a "knock-out" shot was required; little Hobbs, the Englishman, who sent down his stones in an unorthodox manner, but always within an inch of where his "skipper" wanted them, so that a particularly brilliant shot came to be known, not as a "beauty" or a "daisy," but as a "Jimmy Hobbs."

But all the while Bernhardt had been developing his plans with the deliberate skill of a born general. He had forced the enemy to unmask the batteries that guarded the lower part of the town. These he could have forced at a price, had he willed, for, though cunningly constructed, snow ramparts are not an effective protection even against rifle fire. But to have done this would have meant long hours of heavy loss, with the grim prospect of stern street fighting when the last redoubt yielded to his superior forces. Could he cap-

ture the Marienkastel and establish the few pieces of artillery he had brought so laboriously with him, the town would be at his mercy, and he could make,—as he had said,—any terms he wished. By eleven o'clock the movement against the old Schloss commenced in earnest. Bernhardt might have brought his guns to bear on the ancient masonry, but there were sentimental reasons for not reducing the historic pile to a heap of rubble; nor was he the man to waste time in an artillery duel if the place could possibly be taken by a *coup de main*. The Marienkastel must be restored intact to its rightful owner and peace dictated to the dethroned monarch before the sun sank to rest behind the western mountains.

So Saunders,—watching the course of operations from a lofty tower,—perceived imposing bodies of Infantry approaching against him on three sides. On they came on their skis over the soft snow—Guides in extended order to the right, Sharpshooters cresting a low bluff to the left, and throwing up a hasty entrenchment of snow with the evident intention of holding the hill against any retaliatory turning movement on the part of the garrison; and in the centre,—clinging to the wooded ground,—came a powerful force of Guards in their winter fighting garb of white. In the extreme rear was Gloria with the reserve, guarding the ammunition sleighs and a battery of field guns.

Between the invaders and the Schloss lay the bobsleigh run, and Saunders,—expecting a bombardment of the Marienkastel,—had filled the track with a strong

advance guard of his men. The bob-run made an excellent trench, and fortunately at this point had but a very slight declivity, so that the men found no difficulty in retaining their position on its glassy surface. The track indeed started high up by the Marienkastel, just above Major Flanne's curling-rink, and began with a tremendously steep S-shaped curve, known as "The Castle Leap"; then it went straight for a bit and almost level, then wound round again with gradually increasing steepness, and so on in a succession of curves and bends till it joined the main road some thousand feet below, near the hamlet of Riefendorf.

But before a shot was fired against the castle a small party was seen approaching under a white flag. Through his field-glasses Saunders detected the form of his friend Trafford accompanied by a couple of officers, all on skis. Instantly Saunders sent out a corresponding party, also under the white flag. Trafford, having expressed a desire to see the officer commanding the Schloss, was blindfolded, together with his two satellites, and conducted through the lines of the defence to the enceinte of the Marienkastel.

"You are in the presence of the Commander," said the officer who had conducted him to the courtyard, where Saunders was awaiting him. "What is it you have to say?"

"My message is brief," said Trafford, speaking in German, and saluting his unseen adversary. "It can be framed in one word—surrender!"

"And it can be answered in one word," replied

the Commander of the Marienkastel, also in German.
“And in a good English word—‘No.’”

“Saunders, by all that’s wonderful!” ejaculated Trafford.

“The same, dear disturber of the peace.”

“Then that makes things much easier. I am a humane man, as you know, and I have no particular desire to kill or be killed. We are in a position to take this eligible château, which belongs of right to the lady I am privileged to call Queen. But in the taking you will probably hurt a few of my loyal and trusty followers, and we shall certainly damage some of yours. My suggestion is, that you should evacuate with the full honours of war, retaining all arms and standards, and playing any drums, bugles, or other instruments of military music you may chance to possess.”

“And in return for our obliging courtesy?”

“We will give a free amnesty to all who have taken part against her gracious Majesty Queen Gloria. As for one Karl, styling himself King of Grimland, he can live anywhere he likes outside the territories, possessions, and dependencies of the aforesaid Gloria, and he will be granted a revenue of one hundred thousand kronen per annum from the royal treasury.”

“The proposition is dazzlingly attractive,” returned Saunders. “But I regret that I must refuse. My orders leave me no alternative.”

“Nonsense!” said Trafford warmly: “Here are we, two Anglo-Saxons in the middle of a host of benighted foreigners ready to fly at each others’ throats!

What nobler or more dignified proceeding than to make terms over their heads, prevent bloodshed, establish peace, and inaugurate an era of good-will and prosperity?"

"A most ennobling idea," agreed Saunders, "and one which can easily be carried out by your renouncing your schemes of robbery and usurpation. If you agree to lay down your arms, and throw yourself on the mercy of my royal master, I will use my influence with him—which is considerable—to grant a full amnesty to all traitors, rebels, and discontents, including yourself."

"Enough jesting!" cried Trafford. "Gloria owns nine-tenths of the country, and we have a sufficient force with us to take Weissheim two or three times over. I want to save life—she wants to save life. We have no time to waste. Will you surrender—yes or no?"

"No!"

Trafford stretched out his hand blindly in the direction of his friend.

"Good-bye!" he said soberly. "In ten minutes we shall be potting at each other. I hope it won't be our misfortune to hit each other."

"Good-bye!" replied Saunders, gripping his enemy's hand with a strong pressure. "I share your wish to the full. I regret that circumstances do not find us on the same side, but the fault is none of my making."

There was a momentary silence and in that silence was audible a peculiar humming, grinding roar, the

penetrating music of granite bowls gliding over thick ice.

"What's that?" asked Trafford.

"Curling," replied Saunders. "A match on Major Flannel's rink."

"Where's that?" As much of Trafford's face as was visible under the bandage looked thoughtful.

"Two hundred yards above us in a hollow near the start of the bob-run. Why?"

"Nothing," said Trafford. "Only they ought to be warned that they are playing a dangerous game. A chance shot might convert a pleasant pastime into a black tragedy."

"I sent to warn them half an hour ago," replied Saunders, "but the sole reply was that they were having a most interesting match, and that they hoped I should have equally good sport."

Trafford laughed and gave his friend a final hand-grip.

"Good-bye, again," he said. "I respect your decision to stick to your post—but it is a pity,—a great pity."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

TRAFFORD AND THE TRENCH

BERNHARDT himself was directing the movement against the Marienkastel. He dominated the whole force as completely as though he had been trained to the art of war instead of the services of the Church. All felt that success depended on one man, and that man was the keen-eyed enigma who seemed to blend a strain of genius with the taint of madness in his seething brain.

"Their answer?" he demanded of Trafford, on the latter's return from his fruitless parley.

"See us d——d first," replied the American.

"Ha! That sounds like Saunders," said Bernhardt with a laugh.

"It *was* Saunders. I'm sorry we couldn't come to terms, but my friend is a pig-headed gentleman, and he won't shift till we poke our rifles through the castle windows."

"Dear Saunders!" exclaimed Bernhardt. "How like him to give us a good fight! We'll rush a couple of hundred men up for a frontal attack, and see what happens. Let it be the Guards under Captain Zaccari. Give the order now, if you please."

The charge sounded, and the men advanced in open order, only to be met with a withering fire from the advance guard entrenched in the bob-sleigh run. A good few dropped, and Bernhardt having learned what

he required, gave the command to halt. The men accordingly flung themselves prone in the deep snow, occasionally sniping as a head showed itself above the ice bank of the toboggan track.

"We must enfilade that trench," said Bernhardt to Trafford, who had joined him. "How long will it take to get our guns up to the top of the run?"

"Two hours, if the enemy don't interfere. Two years, if they do. It's a steep bit of hill, and this sun is making the snow soft on the surface."

"True," agreed Bernhardt. "Then we must advance all along the line. It will be costly, but we'll give them a hot time when we get to close quarters."

"We shall lose at least a hundred men," objected Trafford.

"More, I think," said Bernhardt coolly; "but we shall take the Marienkastel."

"I've got an idea," said Trafford musingly.

"Out with it!"

"Give me twenty men and twenty minutes, and I'll turn those fellows out of the bob-run—or my name's not George Trafford."

"Choose your men and choose your moment," he said, flashing a glance at his companion, "but remember that time presses."

"I am ready now," said Trafford, his face alight with enthusiasm. "Any twenty men will do, provided they are good ski-ers and know which end of a rifle goes off."

Bernhardt gave the order for twenty men of the Guides to attach themselves under Trafford.

"When you hear a bugle-call push on with all your strength," said the latter; "and if you take Saunders prisoner deal gently with him."

Making a detour in order to take all available cover, Trafford led his men towards the starting point of the bob-sleigh run. His movement,—hidden by the configuration of the ground,—was unnoted by the garrison, nor did he meet with any opposition on his way. The hum of the curling-stones led him on, and as he drew nearer the stentorian shouts of the "skippers," as they sung out encouragement to the different members of their sides. When he reached the top of the hill where the run commenced he found himself looking down on to a frozen pond, whereon a number of sunburnt men were plying brooms in front of a slithering curling-stone.

"Sweep, boys, sweep!" yelled out Major Flannel. "Bring it all the way! It'll be a 'Jimmy Hobbs' when it stops. Up besoms, lads! It's drawn the port! Thank you, Hobbs—it's a beauty—right on the pot lid. Man, you're a curler!"

"I beg your pardon," Trafford interrupted, descending on to the ice, and saluting. "I am sorry to interrupt your pastime."

Major Flannel looked up and surveyed the intruder, whose approach had been completely unnoticed by the engrossed enthusiasts.

Trafford was in a dark-green uniform with a sword at his side. In one hand he bore a bugle, and in the other a ski-ing pole.

What this warlike figure was doing on the curling-

rink, and why it should address him in faultless English was a mystery to the worthy Major. Then he noticed that the high snow bank behind the rink was crowned with a score of riflemen. The game was suspended, and the curlers gathered round the intruder.

"Are we in the way of the fighting?" asked "Sandy" Fraser.

"Not in the least," replied Trafford, with a smile: "but all the same it is my painful duty to interrupt your game."

"But we don't mind war risks," objected the Scot.

"So I have been told," said Trafford; "but the fact is we want to borrow your curling-stones."

Mystification of the profoundest nature showed itself on the faces of the curling fraternity.

"You're a humourist, sir," said Fraser at length.

"Among other things, yes," agreed Trafford; "but at the present moment I'm in deadly, sober earnest. We're trying to take the Marienkastel, but Karl's men are holding the run, and unless we can dislodge them it'll be a bloody business capturing the place. I'm sorry to spoil sport, but I must annex your curling-stones in the name of Queen Gloria—you'll see why in a minute."

And so saying, Trafford gave a command in German to his men. Instantly they jumped down on to the ice.

"Each man take a stone and carry it up to the top of the toboggan run!" he called out.

There were only sixteen stones to the twenty men, so four men were perforce inactive. The others pro-

ceeded to carry out the command with unquestioned discipline.

"Man, man," expostulated "Sandy" Fraser sorrowfully, "you're spoiling a gran' match."

But Major Flannel took a fiercer line of protest.

"What the blazes are you doing, sir?" he spluttered, red with indignation. "This is my rink, and these stones are mine and my guests!"

The four soldiers who had had no stones allotted them began to handle their rifles expectantly. Trafford, however, checked any untoward action on their part with a curt gesture and a quick-flung command.

"Force is an ugly kind of argument, gentlemen," he said, turning to the two "skippers." "It grieves me exceedingly to have to appeal to it. Please do not make my position any harder. It is bad enough to spoil the sport; it would be cruel if I had to spoil the sportsmen."

Slowly and dimly, but nevertheless surely, the Major began to perceive the hopelessness of arguing the rights and wrongs of the situation. He had a profound contempt for any soldiers except those of his own country, but a saving spark of common sense rescued him from the tragic folly of resistance.

"I'd never built up a better 'house' in my life," he said petulantly. "We were lying 'two stones' and with another shot to play might easily have been three."

"Be careful of the pink stones with the blue ribbon on the handle!" Fraser called out in exaggerated

trepidation. "My mother's just sent them to me as a Christmas present from Aberdeen."

A laugh followed this sally—good-humour was restored.

"Gentlemen," called out Trafford, "mount this snow bank here with me, and you will see a sight that will more than recompense you for a ruined game and the possible loss of your curling-stones!"

So saying, Trafford himself mounted the snow bank at the commencement of the bob-sleigh run. The curlers followed, one or two grumbling still, others with a belated interest in the fortunes of the day.

"Now, then," cried Trafford in German, to his command, "when I say 'go,' hurl those stones down the toboggan-run! All together, now—one, two, three,—go!"

The men swung back their granite burdens and then hurled them with all their force on to the shining surface of the icy track. Swiftly the stones glided down the sharp incline, gathering pace at every yard of their downward course. Round the first bend they swept, banging against each other in a jostling rush of irresistible momentum.

"That's one way of enfilading a trench," said Trafford to the Major, as the last stone,—a pink one with a blue ribbon,—swept out of sight. "Shrapnel's not in it with—Aberdeen granite;" and raising his bugle to his lips he sounded the "charge," clear and true.

Then it was that the curlers had compensation for their spoiled sport. The whole line of the attack, Guides, Sharpshooters, and Guards, seemed to spring

into being out of the snow, and hurl themselves in a parallel rush towards the Marienkastel. Bugles blew wild music from their brazen throats; "Forwards!" cried officers with drawn swords to their men, and "Forwards!" the men cried back to them with the deep-throated joy of battle.

"Forwards!" shouted Bernhardt, pressing with the van, reckless of personal danger, conscious only of the possible fear of others, and of the supreme importance of pushing home the present attack at all costs.

A spluttering volley rang out from the enemy's entrenchment, but scarce a man of the attack dropped. Nor was this to be wondered at: Saunders' men were in confusion. A curling-stone weighs about sixteen pounds, and when it is travelling at a rate of forty miles an hour is almost as deadly as a cannon-ball; nay, they were more alarming than ordinary shot or shell, for they were visible, and the men who might have faced the unseen death struggled frantically to avoid the visual peril of the granite avalanche. There was much breaking of bones and crushing of ribs, cries of agony and groans of tribulation. Rifles went off at various angles, friends grappled with friends, and many, pushed on by the weight of the accumulated stones and the press of writhing limbs, began to slither down the toboggan track,—even as Frau von Bilderbaum and Von Hügelweiler had done two days before. It was a moment of torment and confusion, a moment when loyalty and discipline were helpless and unavailing, a moment, indeed, when a much less determined at-

tack would have prevailed against such twisted chaos and dismay.

"The Kastel's ours!" cried Trafford enthusiastically, as Bernhardt's force swept irresistibly over the toboggan run and pressed furiously to the walls of the Schloss.

"Heaven help Saunders now!" he added, a swift fear crossing his brain. "By gad, they're bolting!" he cried in glad surprise, as the garrison of the castle streamed out and away with scarce a backward glance, and never a backward shot at the triumphant enemy.

"That's not like Robert Saunders—but I'm glad, devilish glad."

"Congratulations, sir!" said Major Flannel, shaking Trafford warmly by the hand. "I've seen a bit of fighting in my day, and I've seen a bit of sport, but I've never seen the two things blended so harmoniously before in the whole course of my existence."

Trafford returned the hand-grip, but waited for no further compliments from the enthusiastic Major. Down beneath him, riding on a gun-carriage pulled by a score of soldiers, Gloria van Schattenberg was mounting the slope towards the long-forfeited home of her ancestors. And with bent knees and trailing pole Trafford ski-ed down the incline, to be the first to offer her congratulations on her victory.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

MEYER AT WORK

MEYER had not disliked the battle quite so much as he had expected. Karl's winter palace, the Brunvarad,—where he had taken up his headquarters,—was sufficiently remote from the danger zone to allow his mind to work coolly and collectedly on his master's behalf. And on the whole he almost enjoyed it. Karl was with him, silent, almost sulky in the enforced inactivity Fate and his councillors assigned him. He would have been happier in the trenches handling a rifle, or sighting one of the big Creusot guns that barked defiance at his foes. But for the moment circumstances held him in the little room where Meyer,—with a big map spread before him, and a telephone receiver at his ear,—issued the brief messages or despatched the brief notes that meant so much to the issues of the day.

"War has been compared to the game of chess," remarked Meyer during a brief pause when the telephone bell was silent, and no *aide-de-camp* rushed in with his vital message from the front; "and if the simile is trite and commonplace, it is certainly especially applicable in this case. One sacrifices piece for piece, a pawn for a knight, a knight for a castle, and so forth, and he who ultimately has the best of the exchange has an easy victory at the finish. In our

case we are sacrificing a castle—the Marienkastel—for a Queen. When the enemy's Queen is *hors-de-combat* they can make but a poor bid for victory."

"The simile will bear pressing even closer," said Karl surlily, "for by the rules of the game the king can only move one step in any direction." And with a wave of his hand the discontented monarch indicated the four walls which confined his activities.

"It is our duty to prevent you from being checkmated, sire," returned the Commander-in-Chief. "Personally, I hold fighting a coarse sport, and am well content to do the intellectual part at the end of the telephone."

The ringing of the instrument punctuated his remark with singular appropriateness.

"Well, who are you and what is it?" he demanded.

"I'm Saunders," returned a voice; "I'm in the *abatis* in the churchyard."

Meyer glanced round at the clock. It pointed to the hour of twelve

"Then you're there half an hour too soon," he returned.

"Not a moment, I assure you," came the reply. "Trafford sent Major Flannel's curling-stones hurtling down the bob-run, and spoilt the formation of my advance guard. In the confusion they rushed us, and,—as I understood you did not want us to be wiped out,—we bolted manfully for the *abatis*. Here we are, and here we'll remain as long as you wish."

"And what's happening in the Marienkastel?" asked the Commander-in-Chief.

“ Bernhardt’s holding it in force.”

“ And his guns?”

“ Are being slowly dragged up the snow slope.”

“ How long will it take to get them in position?”

“ At least an hour. The sun has made the snow soft.”

“ Thank you,” said Meyer. “ Stay where you are, please, till further orders,” and replacing the receiver he rose to his feet.

“ Now, sire,” he said, “ the King can move more than one step at a time.”

“ In what direction?”

“ The Marienkastel.”

They left the Brunvarad, Karl leading, by the great doorway at the base of the armoury tower. Here a couple of horses were awaiting them—big, yellow, maize-fed brutes, raw-boned and angular, but serviceable steeds on a rough path or a frozen highway.

“ I should feel a little happier if you would take me into your complete confidence,” said Karl as they rode out of the palace courtyard. “ So far, I have listened to one-sided conversations on the telephone, and brusque orders to breathless *aides-de-camp*, but I hardly know what portions of Weissheim are still mine and which are Gloria’s.”

“ The enemy have taken the Marienkastel, as we intended they should, but—they have taken it three-quarters of an hour too soon. The insufferable Trafford,—who saved your life and rent your kingdom,—has the subtlety of the serpent without the harmlessness of the dove. He enfiladed Saunders’ trench in

the bob-sleigh run with curling-stones, and in the confusion Bernhardt rushed the Schloss."

" Cannot we re-capture it? " asked Karl. " I should not mind leading the forlorn hope."

" As my place is by my royal master's side," responded Meyer drily, " I must veto the suggestion with all the authority I possess."

" Then what are we to do? "

" Employ the enthusiasm of others, repress our own. Von Hügelweiler, who hates Trafford and loves Gloria,—and therefore would like to destroy them both,—is waiting in Drechler's farm at the top of Sanatorium Hill with a park of howitzers. When he gets the order the mortars will talk. The distances have been carefully measured, and the Marienkastel may already be numbered among the disappearing relics of old Grimland."

" And the Princess Gloria? " asked Karl.

" Will cease to be an effective factor in Grimland politics."

Karl frowned. He had been ruthless enough in 1904, but then he was fighting against men. He was no sentimentalist, and he meant holding his own, though regiments were decimated in the process, and the snows of his beloved Weissheim were stained scarlet with good blood. But he had ever had a soft corner in his heart for the laughter-loving Princess, and his spirits sank at the prospect of her bright young life being sacrificed to the brutal, senseless Moloch of civil strife. The rough, fierce men who held the uplands for him were fair game for powder and shot, the

levies of the plain were *chair a cannon*, maybe; but Gloria von Schattenberg was a creature of too delicate flesh to be maimed by live shell or splintering masonry, and his manhood revolted at the gruesome prospect.

"We must try and save the Princess," he said after a minute's silence.

Meyer said nothing. The nearer they advanced to the scene of action the lower his spirits fell. The sun was high in the cloudless heavens, and the distant mountains reared their snowy crests against a blue that was astounding in its intensity. A purple haze swam in the hollows of the hills; the buntings twittered in cheerful chorus amidst the dripping pine trees, now that their song was broken no longer by the crude music of the cannons' roar. For the moment Nature spoke of peace, but Meyer knew that there was no peace. There was a pause in the struggle, a lull before the storm, a moment when, by mutual consent, the hand-grip was relaxed, preparatory to the final struggle when one combatant or the other would be forced ruthlessly to his knees. And Meyer in his room, directing movements from a distance, was a very different person from Meyer within striking distance of a mobile foe. The man had no stomach for fighting. His mouth was dry and his pulses drumming a craven melody in his ears. He was afraid, and he was painfully conscious of his fear; but although his suffering was acute his brain was working tolerably well behind the half-shut eyes.

There is a kind of cowardice that never loses its self-

control at a crisis, just as there is a kind of bravery that never keeps it.

A turn of their path brought them into the main road running between the town of Weissheim and the Marienkastel; and if there had been peace in the outlook over the matchless valley of the Niederkessel and amidst the high sanctuaries of the mountains, there was war here in stern evidence and grim reality. Upward pressed the troops who had held the redoubts of the lower town, and whose presence was now needed on higher ground. Downward, on sleighs painted with the red cross of mercy, progressed those who had suffered in the brief defence of the Marienkastel. Karl and his General saluted, the latter with no softening of his cynical features, but a strange numbness of his breast that was fear tempered, perhaps, with mercy, certainly with horror. A couple of hundred yards up the road they halted; here, within easy range of the Marienkastel, but protected by the banked-up snow at the side of the road, were gathered a considerable number of soldiers under the eye of General von Bilderbaum. The latter advanced and saluted as soon as he saw his Sovereign.

"How are matters progressing, General?" asked the King.

"They are not progressing, sire," replied the General bluntly. "We are doing nothing, while the enemy is doing much. In forty minutes their guns will be in position, and the loyal town of Weissheim will be wiped off the map."

"Meyer does not seem to have bestowed his confi-

dences very widely," returned Karl. "I have only just learned that there is a battery of howitzers waiting to pound the Marienkastel into brick-dust. Why they do not commence pounding is known only to my intelligent Commander-in-Chief."

"When one destroys a wasps' nest," said Meyer smiling, "it is wise to protect oneself against the inmates. When the castle becomes untenable Bernhardt and his men will buzz out in a thoroughly bad temper. Unless this road, where we now are, is held strongly, there is nothing to prevent them taking their afternoon tea in the Brunvarad."

Karl nodded; despite his present irritability he had considerable faith in his Commander-in-Chief. Not so old Bilderbaum.

"What about these howitzers?" he asked scornfully. "What is there to prevent Bernhardt rushing them? Where are they?"

"They are in a very safe place," said Meyer with a wave of his hand to the right. "If Bernhardt means to storm them he'll have to face six quick-firers and two hundred riflemen on either flank; also he'll have to climb a quarter of a mile of soft snow without a stick of cover for his men. Anyone who can reach those howitzers may keep them as a memento of a warm afternoon."

"And who is in command?" asked the still unconvinced General.

"Von Hügelweiler," replied Meyer.

General Bilderbaum uttered a sonorous oath that was more like a roar than an expletive.

"Hügelweiler!" he cried. "I wouldn't trust him with a corporal's guard. He's a liar and a traitor on his own confession."

"He is probably both," agreed Meyer, "and he is also a bitterly disappointed man. The gentleman for whom his hatred is being nursed is now in the Marienkastel, and I don't think you need have any anxiety as to the accuracy of Von Hügelweiler's guns."

For a moment Meyer's calm assurance won silence. The troops continued to arrive from the lower town and take their appointed positions on the road that led to Weissheim. The Commander-in-Chief might be making mistakes, but if so they were not the errors of a stupid mind. Karl began for the first time to appreciate the true merits of the Jew's scheme. When the invaders' position in the castle was rendered untenable they would have no path open to them but the one by which they had come. Then, doubtless having frittered away their strength in vain efforts to break through to Weissheim, Meyer would deliver a crushing counter attack as they drew off, spent and shattered, down the hillside. Von Bilderbaum, however, failed to see things with the same eye of faith.

"Why doesn't Von Hügelweiler open fire now?" he demanded.

"Because he has not received the order to do so," Meyer replied.

"Why not?" persisted Bilderbaum.

Meyer's eyes contracted. He had the air of a wise man dealing with a foolish one; and when he spoke it was with more than a touch of impatience.

"The enemy's guns are now half-way up the hill," he said. "When they have kindly brought them the whole way we shall have something to say to them."

"And they may have something to say to us," retorted the General.

Meyer shrugged his shoulders, as if convinced of the hopelessness of trying to instil intelligence into the other's skull.

"If I were you," went on Bilderbaum, "I should send a couple of regiments full pelt against those guns. We might bring off a very effective ski-charge down the slope."

"And lose fifty or sixty men," sneered Meyer.

"It would at any rate be fighting. At the present moment we're lowering the *morale* of our troops by palsied inaction."

"If General von Bilderbaum were in supreme command of his Majesty's forces," said Meyer, "I have no doubt that the battle would be short, sharp, and decisive—only the decision would not be in our favour."

Von Bilderbaum flushed scarlet. He was essentially a fighting man, with the fighting man's contempt of the Jew, and his calculated inactivity.

Meyer's gentle gift of rudeness pierced his thick skin with inflaming venom. A sense of discipline and the presence of the enemy alone restrained him from violence. In despair he turned to his Sovereign.

"Have I your permission to head a charge against the guns, sire?" he asked.

But Karl's face had taken on a new look of decision.

"You have not," he replied firmly. "Any fool can

head a charge. I suggested doing so myself half an hour ago. In theory I am a King and you a General; in practice we are pawns in Meyer's game. It is wisest to accept our limitations, and only to move when and where we are told. If I can submit, Von Bilderbaum, surely you can, too."

"Your Majesty's words are very touching," said Meyer in his colourless tones, which might have concealed the profoundest contempt or the most genuine feeling. "This is the hour of the *savant*, of the professor of '*Kriegspiel*,' of the man whose brain is unaffected by the glamour of heroism or the poetry of shock tactics. The hour of the fighting man will come later—your hour, Von Bilderbaum—the hour of big deeds and little cunning, of personal glory and the primordial joy of destruction. Believe me, General, I envy you your hour more than you grudge me mine. It is better to be a fighting dog than a pusillanimous old fox."

Bilderbaum looked his superior squarely between the eyes.

"You were a fighting dog, yourself, in 1904," he retorted.

"For ten minutes," sneered the Commander-in-Chief.

"For ten very useful and strenuous minutes," maintained the General. "I am not sure that I am not proud of serving under you. I am quite sure that it is a good thing for his Majesty that you are not serving under me."

Meyer ignored the honourable concession. He was

gazing through his field-glasses at the distant guns, which were now three parts of the way up the hill.

"The secret of military success," he murmured, extracting his notebook and scribbling something in it, "is to strike when the iron's hot—not before. Give that to your A.D.C., General," he went on, tearing out the leaf and folding it, "and tell him to take it instantly to the officer in command of the howitzer battery on Sanatorium Hill. The moment has arrived for destroying the wasps' nest."

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

NEWS FROM THE CAPITAL

THE battle of Weissheim was a very small affair, viewed from an European standpoint. The forces engaged on either side were trivial, and the issues at stake of comparative indifference to all save those directly concerned; and yet it was not devoid of picturesqueness in its incidents, nor even of academic interest to those who study the conduct of military operations in the high regions of deep snow and zero frosts. The bombardment of the Marienkastel was an excellent example of concentrated artillery fire on a mediæval building, of the efficacy of modern explosives on ancient masonry, of the superiority of iron and melinite to stone and concrete. Bernhardt's gallant attempt to storm the destructive battery was as noble in its way as the heroic charge at Balaclava; its failure was even more pronounced. He returned from that spirited enterprise with half his men and a rifle bullet in his dangling left arm, but with an unbroken spirit and untamed energy.

The Marienkastel existed no longer as a building. Its halls were unroofed, its great tower but dwarf piers of splintered masonry. The position,—which had been captured with such skill and gallantry,—had been but a bait in the enemy's trap. The Marienkastel, indeed, commanded Weissheim, but Sanatorium Hill com-

manded the Marienkastel. The ex-priest's local knowledge had been inferior to Meyer's, and that inferiority spelt the difference between winning and losing the battle.

During Bernhardt's absence on his desperate effort to spike Von Hügelweiler's mortars, Trafford had been left in command of the castle. Finding his position untenable and his losses increasing at an appalling rate, he drew off to the sheltered ground by Major Flannel's curling-rink. Here they were safe from attack; and at the same time powerless for purposes of aggression. Gloria was with him, bitter at the destruction of her home, sick at the loss of her followers, anxious to do some desperate action which should win back their lost advantage.

The day which had opened with triumph seemed destined to close in shame. A man's courage was in her heart, a stubborn pride in her vigorous blood, but the sight of the wounded,—sufferers for her ambition,—won a softer mood, and she hastened to give comfort where she could no longer arouse enthusiasm. At about three o'clock in the afternoon Bernhardt and his remnant entered the hollow, which Trafford had now put in a position of defence. The ex-priest looked round at the entrenched riflemen and the guns in their snow embrasures, and laughed mockingly.

"On what can you train your guns here?" he asked, attempting to bind his wounded arm with the aid of his uninjured member and his strong teeth.

"On anyone who wants to play a game on Major Flannel's rink," Trafford replied, tendering his as-

sistance for the stricken limb. "Our motto for the moment is 'defence not defiance.' We cannot hurt the enemy, and the next best thing is not to let him hurt us."

"And you are content with that?" asked Bernhardt with scorn.

"I have a beautiful nature," the American replied quietly, "and I accept the decrees of Providence in a chastened spirit. We came to capture a town and a king, and we have captured—a curling-rink! Unfortunately we have sent the curling-stones down the bob-sleigh run, so we are unable to derive much benefit from our achievement."

Bernhardt looked wonderingly at the other.

"And men call *me* mad," he said after a pause.

"And with reason," retorted Trafford. "You are a Napoleon *in parvo*, a man who desires big things quite apart from their intrinsic value. You want a kingdom for your playground, and princes for your playthings; that is what scientists call megalomania, and I, bad taste. There are better things at hand for the normal man: a wife and children and a good conscience."

"A coward's creed!" was Bernhardt's comment.

"Maybe, but mine."

Bernhardt tossed his head in despairing amazement.

"To think that you of all men should sink so hopelessly at our first rebuff!—Trafford, the hero of the revolution, is no better than a craven!"

"There is more than one kind of cowardice, Bernhardt," rejoined Trafford without heat; "and I admit

I was a coward in the Marienkastel, when the shells dropped and buried men alive under tottering walls. I don't think I was ever afraid before, but then I had never been in action with—with a woman."

"But 'perfect love casteth out fear,'" mocked Bernhardt.

"Then is my love very far from perfect," came the ready answer. "I was in a very torment of anxiety. A good man groaning out his life with a lump of lead in his breast, and a broken wall across his legs, is bad enough, but she"—and Trafford pointed to Gloria, who was engaged in tending a poor, disfigured wretch who had been moved from the stricken castle—"my God, Bernhardt, I *was* a coward!"

"Women don't feel pain as much as men," said Bernhardt brutally. "Our anxiety on their account is a purely selfish sentiment based on the lowest instincts."

"Your theory would be preposterous even if we were animals," replied Trafford. "As applied to humanity it is blasphemy. I fancy your wound hurts you."

"Aye, my wound hurts me—not the wound in my arm—I don't feel that—but the wound in my spirit. I am not one to sit down under defeat."

"Then what do you propose to do?"

"Push on to the Brunvarad!"

"And play Meyer's game for him! The road is held with every rifle and quick-firer they can cram into it."

"We can get through at a price," said Bernhardt between his teeth.

"I don't think we could get through at any price," rejoined Trafford with conviction. "If we go on we are beaten men; if we stay here we may make a draw of it."

Bernhardt uttered an exclamation of contempt.

"There is no such word in Grimland," he said. "We either win victory or we drain the cup of defeat to its dregs. Are we to return to the good loyal town of Weidenbruck and say, 'We have lost three hundred men and a dozen guns; we have not captured Weissheim, nor taken Karl, but we have made a draw of it? Strew garlands in our path and deck your houses with bunting, for we have escaped total destruction!'"

"I was not suggesting returning to Weidenbruck," said Trafford.

"Can we stay here? What are we to eat? Where are we to sleep? The nights are far from warm at these altitudes. To sleep out of doors at Weissheim is to sleep the sleep that knows no waking. If we cannot go forward we must fall back on our communications at Wallen. The hospitality of Major Flannel's curling-rink is not one to be accepted permanently.

Trafford was silenced. Events had landed them in an *impasse*, and to curse the whole folly of the expedition was alike ignoble and unprofitable.

It might have been wiser,—as he had advocated at Wallen,—to have abandoned the scheme of conquest, to have sought the joys of life in quiet retirement from the scene of clashing ambitions and frenzied upheavals; but the expedition had gone on to its fate and he had gone, consenting, with it. And things be-

ing as they were, Bernhardt's logic was relentlessly true. To go back with their purpose unfulfilled was to test the brittle fabric of the sullen Weidenbruckers' allegiance with too shrewd a strain. And if they could not go forward they must go back. In grim perplexity he called to Gloria.

"Is it worth while trying to force the road to Weidenbruck?" he asked her.

"If you had been tending wounded men, you would not ask such a question," she replied quietly.

"I thought the Schattenbergs rose to great heights in great difficulties," sneered Bernhardt. "If we are to shirk our butcher's bill——"

"We have made our mistakes," she interrupted. "Our only chance is for them to make theirs. If we stay here they may attack us."

"Meyer doesn't make mistakes," said the ex-priest, "and if he did it would not be a mistake of that kind. If we stay here the only foes that will attack us will be General Frost and Brigadier Hunger; against such we have no defence."

"It seems to me," said Trafford, "that to go forward is madness, to go back madness, to stay here is madness; and as we must do one of these three things, madness is our portion. Now the most effective kind of lunacy seems to me to stay here till night-fall."

"And then hazard a night attack?" questioned Gloria hopefully.

"Not an attack," rejoined Trafford. "Meyer has very sound theories of defence, and his searchlights are sure to be in excellent working order. No; we

must drop the soldier and become burglars. Where a thousand, or even a hundred, would fail, half a dozen may succeed; and the object of our burglary must be Karl. If we can secure his person and return with it to the capital, we shall have done all,—or nearly all,—we attempted. Weissheim is loyal to an individual not a dynasty, and Karl in the Strafeburg would be a much less attractive person than Karl in the Brunvarad."

Bernhardt laughed softly.

"I begin to have hopes of you again," he said.

Gloria clapped her hands excitedly.

"I knew you would find some way out of the difficulty!" she cried. "There is no such thing as despair with you in our counsels."

"I am fighting for a high stake," Trafford replied. "If I can win success out of the tangled disorder of our fortunes you——"

"If you can capture Karl," she interrupted, "I am sure there will be no political objection to your being —being my consort."

"Only personal objections?" he hazarded.

"There will be none," she said, "I swear it. You are a most gallant and resourceful gentleman, and I might search my kingdom over for your equal."

Trafford noted the genuine enthusiasm of her tones, and nodded grimly.

"You are what they call a 'throw-back,' your Majesty," he said. "You should have lived five hundred years ago, in the age of joust and tourney, when men won their wives by driving enormous spears through the breastbones of their less muscular rivals."

"And you are of the Middle Ages too," she countered; "your ideals, like mine, go back to the early days of chivalry."

"The days of the rack and the Iron Maiden? No, I assure you that with all my faults I am more up-to-date than that. Romance is a fine thing on paper, but in my heart of hearts I would win my soul's desire with a gentle wooing. But to return to our *moutons*: does the plan I have outlined commend itself to my friend Bernhardt?"

"If your proposal had been to put a bullet through Karl's cranium I should say that it bordered on sanity," replied Bernhardt. "But even that would be difficult. Meyer stands or falls by Karl's supremacy—and the Jew is not a man to let his position be forfeited for want of forethought. He will watch over Karl's sacred person as a mother watches over her first-born. Still, we might scheme an attempt for stalking the royal stag."

"I suggested turning burglar," said Trafford. "I consider that a sufficient descent in the social scale, without turning murderer."

"You have not the advantage of being an *absintheur*," was Bernhardt's rejoinder. But at this point the conversation was interrupted; an officer of the Guides had approached and was standing at the salute.

"A man to see your Excellency," he began, to Bernhardt.

"Where from?"

"Weidenbruck."

"His name?"

"Dr. Matti."

Bernhardt whistled.

"His business?" he demanded.

"Private and confidential."

"Hum! Conduct him here, please."

A moment later the doctor stood before them. He was arrayed in a woollen jersey, with a Jäger scarf around his neck. Grey-green knickerbockers and yellow putties veiled his nether limbs. He was wearing smoked glasses, and his feet were shod with skis. His head was bare, and his hair wet and tangled, as though it had had intimate acquaintance with the snow.

"What are you doing here?" demanded the ex-priest.

"I come as a messenger and a fugitive," replied the doctor.

"Your news?"

"Weidenbruck is in a condition of anarchy. You left me as a dictator, but you deprived me of a dictator's only argument—force. You drained the city of troops, and you expected me to impose my will on that turbulent and sinful community. My will was to purify the *stadt*. My men raided the gambling-houses round the Goose-market; they harried the infamous dens of the Hahngasse. I closed the Mailand Kurhaus and that other haunt of immorality, the Augustus Café. For forty-eight hours virtue triumphed, and the worst features of my native town began to disappear with exhilarating rapidity. Then the forces of sin and debauchery put their evil heads

together, and the reaction began. My police were suborned. The cry was raised that a worse tyranny than Karl's had been inaugurated. Rumours that Karl was holding his own and more began to be disseminated in the capital. It was whispered that guilty relations had been established between the young Queen and the accursed American. There was a riot. I called out the soldiers, but they were too few and not over willing. The people who had hounded Karl from his throne cheered his name in the same streets where they had sought his blood. I am no coward, but I was appalled. To calm the tempest would have needed an army corps."

"Or Father Bernhardt," interrupted Trafford.

"Anyway, I fled," the doctor resumed, "because I saw how imperative it was that you should return as soon as you had won your victory."

"And left the city to anarchy?" put in Gloria.

"I left the sons of worthlessness to their own confusion."

"Dr. Matti," said Bernhardt, "you are one of those amiable beings who have theories. If you had amused the Weidenbruckers,—or even let them amuse themselves,—all might have been well. Instead, however, you tried to turn them into angels,—a rôle which Providence has not assigned to any community east of Berlin."

"I meant well——"

"That is what I complain of," interrupted Bernhardt.

"But the situation is only temporarily serious," in-



**"I drink to our success to-night, I drink to the
devil in the devil's own tipple"**

terposed the hapless doctor. "When you have captured Weissheim——"

"When we have captured Weissheim," said Trafford. "Unfortunately we are about a quarter of a mile further from Weissheim than we were two hours ago. And two hours hence we shall very probably be further still."

"Good heavens! You——"

"We are like you, Dr. Matti," went on Trafford. "We have had a failure; like you, we over-rated our own skill and under-rated our enemies'. The situation is bad."

Matti was silent, but his big, plebeian features showed plainly the disappointment and consternation of his mind. The short winter day was winning to its close. Already the sun was falling behind the great wall of the distant mountains; already the snows of the Klauigberg were flushing rose-pink against the greening turquoise of the cloudless sky. A chill had crept into the air, the surface of the curling-rink,—which had been wet under the sun's mid-day power,—was now as slippery as a polished mirror. In an hour it would be dark, and with the dark would come the intense cold that meant death to all that failed to find a night's shelter.

"It is time we fell back towards Wallen," said Bernhardt to Gloria. "I and Trafford will stay behind with a few trusty spirits. If all goes well we will join you to-morrow morning."

"I am going to stay behind too," said Gloria quietly. "Colonel Schale can conduct the retreat."

"I too will stay behind," said Dr. Matti. "I am further from Weidenbruck here than at Wallen."

Bernhardt looked at the doctor's heavy, determined features, and nodded.

"We four," he muttered. "It is enough! My wound burns like fire; the cold has got into it, and it will mortify. To-morrow Dr. Matti can remove the gangrened limb."

Matti's professional instincts were roused by the last words.

"You are wounded?" he said. "You had best let me remove the bullet at once." He produced from his person a small bottle containing a colourless fluid. "I was prepared for emergencies of this nature. A whiff of chloroform——"

"To the devil with your anæsthetics!" cried Bernhardt hotly. "My brain is wanted to-night; my *brain*, Herr Doctor, not a fuddled mass of drugged cells and inert tissue! Take out the bullet if you will, but don't imagine I shall flinch under the knife. There is no pain that I can feel but the pain of disappointment."

"But a mere whiff," began the worthy doctor.

"Do as he bids," said Trafford, taking the bottle from Matti's hand and putting it for safety into his pocket. "That may come in useful later. But I should take out the bullet, if you can," he whispered; "there is a queer look in his eyes, and I fancy the pain is making him light-headed."

"Come, cut out the little lump of lead, doctor," said Bernhardt, "the little messenger that meant so much

harm and achieved so little. Cut deep, Matti, and do not stint the knife. Only leave me my right arm and my brain; for to-night there will be great doings between the dusk and the dawn. Aye, Bernhardt," he went on, talking to himself, "you must rise to great heights. There will be friends to help you—a mad Yankee, a Puritan doctor, and the last of the Schattenbergs. A strange trinity! Nor must I forget my good councillor Archmedai. He must be very near me to-night. Herr Trafford, I have a flask at my belt; it is difficult for me to undo it with one hand. Kindly assist me. A thousand thanks! I drink to our success to-night, I drink to the devil in the devil's own tipple. Death to Karl! Joy to Trafford and his bride! And to Bernhardt—" he tossed down a full measure of his beloved absinthe—"to Bernhardt I drink"—his speech thickened and his eyes wandered vaguely over the group. He drank again—"To Bernhardt I pledge—the great unknown!"

CHAPTER THIRTY.

RECRUITS

By the fireplace of the great hall of the Brunvarad Karl was standing with his two Generals, Meyer and Von Bilderbaum. It was six o'clock, and with the falling of night a thin haze of clouds had swept up from Austria, and a mist of fine snow was descending with silent persistence on hill and roof, rink and run, on the inviolate forts of Meyer's planning, and on the battered remains of the Marienkastel. Within the palace abundant electric light and blazing logs lent cheerfulness to the great stone walls of the chamber, and the huge dark beams that spanned them. On the men's coats were rapidly diminishing tokens of the storm without.

"I have to thank you for your congratulations," Karl was saying as he shook the snow from his cap into the spluttering flame, "and to thank you more especially for the efforts which have rendered those congratulations applicable."

Von Bilderbaum tugged nervously at his huge white moustache.

"I had so little to do, sire," he protested. "If I had headed a ski charge——"

"You would probably not be here to receive my thanks," interrupted Karl with a kindly laugh and a hand laid roughly on the old General's shoulder. "I'm sure Frau von Bilderbaum will agree with me, that

Meyer's tactical passivity was superb. Meyer, again I thank you. You have served me well."

"My motives for doing so were so obvious," drawled the Commander-in-Chief. "Had Bernhardt won I should probably have been shot; certainly exposed to danger and hardships. As it is, I shall sleep well to-night in a comfortable room, with the pleasing conviction that your Majesty's gratitude will ultimately take a tangible form."

Karl laughed heartily. His eye was very bright, and the burden of many years seemed taken off his wide shoulders.

"Upon my word," he said, "I sometimes pity my dear cousins of Germany and England, who rule over united and contented kingdoms. I have my anxieties, God knows, but I also have my compensations. Fair weather is a pleasant thing, but it is the storm that distinguishes the friend from the parasite."

The great bell of the Brunvarad clanged, and a minute later Bomcke announced Robert Saunders and his wife.

"We come to offer your Majesty our congratulations," said Saunders.

Karl took the Englishman's hand, and held it in a firm grasp.

"You are a lucky man," he said with a glance at Mrs. Saunders' radiant cheeks. "You possess the silver of friendship and the gold of love. I have only friendship, and therefore I prize the lesser metal at a great value. If this day is the turning-point of my fortunes, and I become King again of a whole country,

I shall not esteem my happiness complete unless my friend, Robert Saunders, is my right-hand man."

"Your Majesty's fortunes are assured," said Saunders. "The enemy is half-way back to Wallen by now."

"And is being pursued?" asked Karl.

"Von Hügelweiler begged leave to harry them," said Meyer, "and he is harrying them to such purpose that they have shed their guns one by one in their flight. Had it not been for the snow-storm he might have captured a hundred or two prisoners."

"I think," said Karl, "we will not push our victory further. We have won the day, and there has been sufficiency of bloodshed. To-night I am a happy man, and I wish no one ill. Meyer, give orders for Von Hügelweiler to be recalled. He has done his work well, and he shall have his reward."

Meyer withdrew with a shrug to the room where the telephone was installed.

"It is good to see your Majesty happy," said Mrs. Saunders in the silence that followed Meyer's departure. "There has sat a cloud on your brow ever since we have been in Grimland. And to-night for the first time the cloud is gone, and there is sunshine—the old sunshine of 1904—in your face."

"Aye, I am happy," assented Karl with a smile, "happy in my friends."

"Here comes another happy person," said Saunders with an upward glance to the staircase, down which the spacious person of Frau von Bilderbaum was slowly descending.

"Truly spoken," said Karl, for as the ex-maid-of-honour caught sight of her lord and master she quickened her footsteps to a bovine canter, and hurled herself enthusiastically on to the General's breast.

"My brave, brave Heinrich!" she gasped.

"Not at all, at all!" murmured the warrior, disengaging himself gently from the overpowering embrace. "I have done literally nothing. Now, if there had been a ski-charge——"

At this moment Meyer returned from the telephone.

"I have sent to recall Hügelweiler," he said; "but I must say I think the policy of mercy is being overdone. My forbears of Palestine were not half so kind when they got the Amalekites on the run."

"We are not dealing with Amalekites," said Karl, "but with Grimlanders, who happen to be our fellow-countrymen. But come, ladies and gentlemen, let us eat, drink, and be merry, for the storm is over and the sun is already gleaming through the thin edges of the cloud-wrack."

"I am not a weather prophet," said Meyer, "nor did Providence assign to me a sanguine temperament. We have hit the enemy hard, and we have drawn most of his teeth, but until Bernhardt's dead body is discovered stiffening in the snow I have no intention of celebrating a decisive victory."

"Don't do so, then, dear raven," laughed Karl, "but at least take food for your strength's sake. At any rate, I hear that Bernhardt was wounded in the attack on Sanatorium Hill."

"A wounded tiger is not a particularly innocuous

beast," returned the Commander-in-Chief, "and there is a certain friend of Herr Saunders who has the unpleasant gift of rising superior to difficulties, and whom I fear is not even wounded."

The meal at the Brunvarad was neither very long nor very festive. Meyer's taciturn refusal to admit premature victory had a distinctly damping effect on the spirits of the company. Noises of revelry and jubilation were audible from the world without, *feux de joie*, rockets, songs of carousal and bursts of cheering broke in on the desultory conversation that flowed fitfully round the royal dining-table. But these sounds of jubilation only brought a deeper frown to the features of Von Bilderbaum, an added sneer to the lips of the Commander-in-Chief; even the King began to lose the exaltation that had so illumined his countenance.

"The Weissheimer is in his element to-night," said Meyer. "He believes himself a hero, and will get most heroically drunk. If Bernhardt's retreat is only a ruse,—as I suspect,—he will return in the small hours and capture a town guarded by fuddled swine."

"Is there no discipline in my army?" asked Karl irritably.

"Very little just at present," was Meyer's cool reply. "Our friends have stood by us at a pinch; it is too much to expect them to keep sober when the danger is apparently over."

Karl rose angrily to his feet.

"And are we to assume," he demanded, "that the garrisons of our redoubts are drunk at their posts?"

"Certainly not," said Meyer; "they are drunk in the streets and taverns of Weissheim."

"Then I am going where my men ought to be," said Karl. "If we can gather a sufficient body of sober men to hold Redoubt A, we can at least foil any attempt of Bernhardt's to rush the town in the dead of night."

"An admirable idea," said Meyer rising with the others, "and one which I was going to suggest myself. I can manage a searchlight, and Von Bilderbaum can train a *mitrailleuse*, and Herr Saunders can order a company of riflemen—if he can find them."

"Come," said Karl, making towards the door, "let us waste no time!"

"Your Majesty," said Mrs. Saunders, speaking with some hesitation, "this morning I asked my husband to let me accompany him to the Marienkastel. He refused, and with reason. But there is no danger in your quest to-night. I am not asking you to let me help guard the redoubts, but to use a woman's influence in obtaining recruits for your garrison."

"Bravely spoken!" said Karl. "Wrap yourself well in furs, dear lady, and come with us. Bilderbaum can swear, and Meyer can sneer, but a beautiful woman can compel by surer means."

"If Frau Saunders goes, I will go too," said the wife of General Bilderbaum. "I will shake these drunken soldiers into a sense of discipline, or I am not the wife of the bravest soldier in your Majesty's army."

The party of six sallied forth into the night. The snow had ceased falling, and the haze of clouds had drifted southwards, leaving the black dome of night

clean and clear and jewelled with the steely brilliance of the winter stars. Through the courtyard they strode, over the squeaking snow, past the sentinels in their black and yellow boxes with their charcoal braziers, past the great piers of the entrance with their fantastic caps of overhanging snow, and as they went the sounds of revelry assailed their ears with louder note.

“Dissipation is the better part of valour,” was Meyer’s sneering comment, as the refrain of riotous song floated on the thin air. “It is so easy to be brave when the red wine is well within range, and the ammunition of the *bier-halle* is inexhaustible.”

In the road were groups of men, soldiers and civilians, with linked arms, reeling gait, and a gift for making the night hideous with tuneless song.

Within fifty yards of the palace a bonfire had been kindled, and round its ruddy flames a wild dance, a veritable *carmagnole* of drunken triumph, was in progress. Here the royal party stopped to watch, and in a few minutes they were recognised.

“Hail, Karl the Twenty-second of Grimland!” cried a big-bearded man in a military overcoat. “Long live our gallant King!”

“Three cheers for Karl!” cried another, a burly form well muffled in a gigantic green ulster. “Death to the revolutionaries!”

Karl saluted gravely.

“Your sentiments are admirable, sirs,” he said. “It would be perhaps even nobler if you put them into practice.”

"I have been in the firing-line all day," answered the first speaker, "and Bernhardt and his men are two leagues from here by now."

"They may not be so in the small hours of the morning," said Meyer. "If they take it into their heads to return, they will have an easy task to overcome an army of sots."

The dance had ceased for the moment. The majority stood at a little distance from the royal party, ashamed to pursue their orgy, but resentful of its interruption. Two other figures, however, arm in arm,—as if to steady their unruly footsteps,—joined the group. One of them,—a small man with a big blonde moustache,—was clad in the uniform of a private. The other was wrapped in a sheepskin overall and had a woollen helmet pulled down over his ears and chin. The latter raised a guttural voice in husky protest.

"It is hard if we cannot celebrate your Majesty's victory in our own way!" he hiccupped. "A glass or two of wine hurts no man on a cold night like this." He steadied himself against the small soldier.

"Frantz will be all right in half an hour," said the bearded one confidently. "He has had but two or three cups of Kurdesheim, and his head is not over-strong. A few more dances round the bonfire and he will be as sober as any of us."

"Look here, my merry gentlemen," said Meyer. "You seem to me to be only partially drunk, and a brisk walk down to the forts would probably render you tolerably sober. If you will stand by us to-night and help us guard the town till daylight you shall

be drunk for a week on end at the King's expense—I swear it on the honour of a Jew."

"That's well spoken," said the bearded man pensively. "I like to get jolly now and again, but I don't want to see those d——d Weidenbruckers stealing a march on us when we're in our cups. I'm for the King, I am, and to the devil with the Schattenbergs!"

"But to-morrow there will be no sport afoot," objected the man in the green ulster, "and to-night there will be grand fun in the 'Drei Kronen' and outside the Meierei."

A murmur of agreement came from the others.

"They say they're going to burn Father Bernhardt in effigy," said the fellow in the woollen helmet, "and that there will be free beer at the 'Drei Kronen.' The beer at the 'Drei Kronen' is good—very good."

It was Mrs. Saunders who spoke next.

"I think these men are quite right," she said coolly. "They have probably seen a little fighting from a distance, and are quite satisfied with that. They evidently prefer the smell of beer to the smell of gunpowder, and would be quite useless if there was serious work to do in the forts."

"What's that?" demanded the bearded man, in a sudden access of indignation. "We afraid! My father was a soldier, and so was my grandfather, and I have served his Majesty twelve years come Michaelmas, and one doesn't serve twelve years in the army of Grimland without learning something about ball cartridges. Afraid! Bah! I'd sooner spend a night in the trenches potting at old Bernhardt and his friends

than drink the best brandy in the cellars of the Brunvarad."

"An admirable sentiment," said Meyer, "but one not apparently shared by your comrade in the green ulster."

"Oh, I like fighting well enough," replied the individual in question, "only it is cold work doing sentry-go when there's no enemy within six miles of you."

"For shame!" cried Mrs. Saunders. "Is your idea of military service the mere excitement of fine-weather fighting? Is not *duty* among your ideals as well as *glory*? We so far mistrust this retreat of Bernhardt's that we are going to Redoubt A to watch against any return of the rebuffed Weidenbruckers. Must we go alone,—four men who are wearied with long hours of anxiety and ceaseless activity, and two women who have never handled a rifle in their existence? Is that your creed of loyalty, your standard of a soldier's honour?"

"Rudolf," said the man in the ulster to the gentleman with the beard, "we must accompany our good sovereign and his friends to the fort. The lady is right. Duty is duty, and the beer of the 'Drei Kronen' can wait. I would have liked a dance outside the Meierei, but——" here he wiped an eye with the sleeve of his ulster—"I am a man of honour—and the beer will keep."

"Forward then!" said Meyer, striking while the iron was hot. "Down the hill to Redoubt A, and gather what recruits we can in the name of duty—and postponed beer."

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

“A SURPRISE”

ONWARD they tramped in silence down the road towards the lower town, and as they went the half-moon pushed its gleaming disc through the melting curtain of cloud, and made of the night a frozen picture of fantastic beauty. To their right the snows of the Trau-altar and Eizenzahn streamed in silver floods towards the glistening plain, where, a full thousand feet below, the village of Riefinsdorf proclaimed itself with cheerful points of golden light.

The sounds of revelry grew distant, and the silence of the sleeping hills made itself felt. It was a prospect of unreal beauty, a duo-tone of violet-black and fairy silver, an impression of eerie shadows and unearthly light.

Saunders and his wife walked hand in hand. The day had brought them very close together, and they were well content. Soon a shuffling sound was heard, and a turn of the road disclosed a body of troops on skis ascending the hill from the opposite direction. The King's party halted in the middle of the way, and Meyer accosted the officer at their head.

“Who are you, sir?” he asked.

“Fifteenth Light Infantry,” was the reply. “I am Captain Lexa, and we are returning from pursuing the enemy, according to orders.”

Meyer cast his eye over the officer's command. There seemed about a hundred and fifty to two hundred riflemen, of whom a good score bore tokens of recent fighting. A few serious cases were covered with rugs, and were being pulled on small sleighs. A further inspection disclosed a number of prisoners in the centre, with hands roped behind their backs.

“ You got into touch, I see,” Meyer pursued.

“ We pressed them closely,” answered the Captain, “ and at first so eager was their retreat that they abandoned all their guns one after another. Further away they rallied, and though they continued to retreat, they easily held us at bay, and went off at their own pace.”

“ Do you think they mean coming back?” asked Karl.

“ No, sire. When we got orders to return they were six or seven kilometres beyond Riefinsdorf; and though we waited and watched them for at least half an hour, they continued to increase the distance, till they were lost to sight in the gloom and the snow.”

“ They're not the right stuff, those Weidenbruckers,” said Von Bilderbaum. “ They can only play a winning game. I don't think we shall see their faces again this winter.”

“ But what of Von Hügelweiler?” demanded Meyer. “ He was in command of the pursuit. Has he been hit by the enemy?”

“ No, sir.”

“ Then why in heaven's name does he not return with you?” persisted the Commander-in-Chief. “ Has

he been loyal for long enough to one side? Or does he, like Cato, prefer to espouse the losing side?"

Captain Lexa hesitated.

"I think he was mad," he said at length. "When your *aide* brought the order of recall, Captain Hügelweiler swore that he had been sent to pursue and would continue to pursue as long as his legs carried his body, and his arms a rifle. The *aide* backed his orders with the King's name, but Hügelweiler harangued his men and bade all such as loved the good game of war follow him to the bitter end. An impossible position was created, and the *aide-de-camp* ordered Von Hügelweiler's arrest. Before, however, the order could be put into execution, the mutinous captain was skiing down a steep snow slope in the direction of the enemy."

"You should have fired on him," said Bilderbaum.

"I gave the order, sir, but the men hesitated. Some of them had served with him earlier in the day, when he had displayed the most reckless courage. Besides, his refusal to halt, seeming rather an excess of gallantry than an act of mutiny, touched their imagination, and the few shots that rang out left him unscathed. Then the *aide-de-camp*, losing his patience, snatched a rifle from one of my units, knelt down in the snow, and brought down the Captain with a well-directed shot."

"And was he killed?" asked Saunders not unfeelingly.

"I think so. If not, he is dead by now, for he was badly hit, and the frost does not spare a man when he is bleeding from an open wound."

"Captain Lexa," said Karl, "you seem a capable

and zealous officer, but your task is not over yet. It may be,—as you and General von Bilderbaum think,—that the Weidenbruckers have had enough hammering for a season, and have no intention of returning. But Meyer thinks otherwise, nor am I one to leave matters to chance. Bernhardt is a madman who is not subject to the ordinary influences of disaster. His lieutenant, Trafford, is a man of exceptional ability and resource. They are not likely, in my opinion, to acquiesce in a discredited return to the capital.”

“They cannot be back at Weissheim for some hours yet, sire,” said the Captain.

“I know. But our men are debauched with victory. They are out of hand. They have done their day’s work, and they want to enjoy the price of their labours. You, Captain, seem a sober, honest soldier with a firm hold over your command. Can I trust you,—when you have rested your men and seen to their rations,—to return in an hour’s time to Redoubt A to watch with us against a surprise attack from our enemies?”

“You may trust me to the death, sire,” said the young officer with emotion, “and for every man of my command whom I fail to bring to the redoubt I will forfeit a year’s promotion.”

“Well spoken, Captain Lexa,” said Karl with a smile. “While there are men like you in my army I can never despair of my fortunes.”

The King and his little party stood at the edge of the road while the regiment resumed its upward progress. Lithe, sunburned men, untired by the long day’s work, they glided swiftly by, one and all saluting as

they passed the royal presence, and ultimately breaking into a shrill cheer as they vanished up the zig-zagging road.

"Thank God for brave men!" said Karl simply, when they had gone.

"We shall not need our friends here after all," said Saunders, referring to the quartet they had enticed from the festive bonfire.

"Aye," said the man with the beard. "You may want us yet. They are gallant fellows, those soldier lads, but they will be tempted up yonder, and the true Grimlander ever meets temptation half way."

"They will not fail me," said Karl, whose optimism seemed to have returned in full force. "My fortunes have turned, and I have no fears of their staunchness."

"Still it would be prudent to take these gentlemen with us," said Meyer. "Lexa and his men may be late, and there will be plenty for them to do."

"Oh, we are coming," pursued the bearded man. "I, too, believe Bernhardt means returning, and I would give ten years of my life to put a bullet through his wicked skull. As for the Princess Gloria, I would not spare that wanton little——"

"Hush, man!" interrupted Karl. "The Princess is a relative of mine."

"Aye, and one to be proud of!" went on the man defiantly. "They say that she and the American Trafford——"

"Never mind what they say," said Karl sternly. "The Princess is a wild, irresponsible girl, but she is as free from grossness as the snows of the Eizenzahn."

“They say——”

“Silence!” thundered Karl passionately, raising an arm as if to strike the speaker across the mouth. “I have known her since she was a tiny child, and though she has rebel blood in her veins, she is as clean and wholesome as a Weissheim night.”

“Your Majesty is generous,” said Von Bilderbaum.

“Maybe,” assented Karl, “but I think we all share the same fault where the Princess Irresponsible is concerned. I, who have seen her grow from a beautiful child into a lovely woman, have still a soft corner in my heart for her; even when her schemings were most alarmingly successful I could never summon hate to my aid in my battle against her. And to-night, when fortune smiles upon me, I could wish to take her small hand in mine and read her a lesson on the iniquity of trying to dethrone one’s first cousin once removed.”

“Your Majesty is sentimental,” said Meyer.

“It is natural to be so on such a night as this,” was the King’s reply. “This still, deep cold should freeze the cynicism even out of your nature. If the Princess fights she must be fought, and she must accept the fortune of war. But when this half-t tipsy ruffian casts aspersions on her purity——”

“Hear, hear!” broke in the man in the green ulster. “Shoot the Princess if necessary, but spare her good name. I, in my humble way, am a great admirer of the pretty little Gloria. She has an eye that laughs, and as sweet a pair of lips as a poor carpenter like me may dare clap eyes upon. The devil I want to harry

is the American Trafford, who mixes up with matters that don't concern him, and brings fire and sword into a poor country that has plenty of troubles already. We've vermin of our own, goodness knows, but this foreign weasel——”

But Karl was in a mood to hear ill of no man. He was convinced,—as he said,—that his fortunes had turned. His natural generosity was in the ascendant, and the magic of the glorious night had won him to a temper of broad benevolence.

“Oh, Trafford,” he laughed, “Providence watches over men like that. They take risks and thrive on them. The bullet is not moulded that will pierce his tough American skin; and I rejoice to think it is so, for he is a most fascinating free lance. He saved me from death in the courtyard of the Neptunburg, and I have not forgotten the debt. Given a state of peace, and I would have him as my guest in the Brunvarad to discuss old battles over my best Tokay.”

They had reached the place where the bob-sleigh track crossed the highway,—a point of the run much dreaded by the steersmen of racing crews.

“If we follow the path that borders the run,” said the bearded man, “we shall save a quarter of a mile at least.”

“That's true,” said Meyer, “but the ladies must be careful where they plant their feet. If they step off the beaten track they will be up to their waists in soft snow.”

“There is a moon,” said the man in the ulster curtly, climbing over the snow bank and leading the

way along the firm but narrow track. The others followed in single file, and for a time nothing was heard but the crunching of snow beneath their feet. For a space their progress lay among pine-trees, through whose black trunks and freshly-silvered branches the moonlight streamed in rays of elfish light. With its mysterious shadows and sharp silences the wood seemed a vast natural treasure house, wherein the frost jewels gleamed with rich profusion and the strange radiance of an enchanted dreamland. To walk with open eyes in such scenes was to lose touch with reality, to forget the sway and swirl of things material, the harsh absurdities of Grimland's civic strife. No wonder a silence fell on the pacing line.

The awakening was rude. As they emerged from the many pillared sanctuary of the forest there was a loud cry of “Now!” Someone, a man in a woollen helmet, threw a cloak around Karl's head and shoulders; someone, a man with a thick beard, struck Saunders heavily in the face, so that he fell back from the firm path into the yielding depth of the untrodden snow. At the same moment Von Bilderbaum, hastening to the King's rescue, was tripped up by the man in the green ulster, and measured his length violently on the hard path. Meyer, quick as thought, whipped out a revolver and fired point blank between the shoulders of Bilderbaum's assailant. Frau von Bilderbaum screamed, and in her emotion stepped off the firm path and disappeared backwards into a sea of incohesive crystals. Before Meyer had time to fire again a man was at his throat, a man with a beard hanging gro-

tesquely from one ear, a man with mad passion in his eye and a nameless oath on his lips.

“ Bernhardt!” gasped Meyer, fighting with the frenzy of a terror-stricken man. His assailant was his superior in weight and vigour, but fortunately for the Commander-in-Chief had but the use of one arm. Nevertheless, the arm that fought him was a limb of steel, the fingers of the sound member as relentless as the tentacles of a devil fish. The Jew sweated and struggled like a man in a nightmare. For a moment, choked and breathless, he was overborne; then relief came. Bilderbaum had regained his feet; the old soldier’s sword was drawn from its scabbard, and the ex-priest hissed his last shuddering blasphemy into the night air.

“ Robert, Robert, are you hurt?” asked Mrs. Saunders, in dire distress, of her struggling spouse, who was making heroic efforts to wade through the waist-deep snow to the *terra firma* of the trodden path.

“ Karl—quick!” urged the breathless Englishman, at length making his voice heard now that the struggle was terminated.

They looked where Karl had been—and there was no one. The man in the woollen helmet, too, had disappeared, and the short individual in the private’s uniform was likewise nowhere to be seen.

“ A bob-sleigh,”—explained Saunders, still short of breath, regaining with assistance the coveted foothold of the path,—“ they pushed him on to a bob-sleigh which was anchored to the bough of a fir-tree. The little soldier man took the helm, and the other sat

guarding the King with a revolver in one hand and the brake-lever in the other.”

“After them!” cried old Bilderbaum excitedly, letting go his wife’s hand so that she relapsed again into the treacherous quagmire of mocking powder. “After them!”

“After them!” repeated Meyer scornfully, rubbing his bruised throat. “We might do an heroic eight miles an hour down this slippery path. *They* will be going forty, at least. We might as well chase the moonbeams!”

“What are we to do?” asked Saunders desperately.

“That is a question that fools always ask themselves when their folly finds them out,” returned Meyer bitterly. “Unfortunately there is no answer to it.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

THE CONQUERING KING

“**BRAKE!**” called a high feminine voice, issuing strangely from the moustached lips of the soldier who steered the abducting bob-sleigh.

The gentleman in the woollen helmet applied the brake, and a sharp turn in the run was negotiated in safety.

“How is Karl?” asked the Princess Gloria, for it was she who was manipulating the wheel at the “bob’s” prow.

“Coming to, I think!” Trafford shouted back; “this cold air would restore a corpse.”

They were in the straight now, and the pace was terrific. Downward they tore through realms of icy air, while the night wind pushed at their throats, brought floods of moisture to their eyes, and roared a wild melody in their deafened ears. It was an exhilarating experience, and even without the added excitement of their desperate deed would have set the blood racing in their veins. But with the excitement was mingled a very definite sense of shame, in Trafford’s case at any rate. Their action had been justified by success, and morally, perhaps, by its absolute necessity in their desperate plight, but it painfully resembled an act of treachery.

“What became of Father Bernhardt and Doctor Matti?” asked Gloria presently.

Trafford leaned forward and answered at the top of his voice:

"They must have been killed! Our weight started the 'bob' before I intended, and we were a hundred yards down the track before I could get my hand to the brake. It was impossible to go back."

"Will they catch us, do you think?"

"Impossible! We are travelling at the rate of an express train. Another twenty minutes of this, and we shall reach the point where Colonel Schale's flying detachment has arranged to wait for us."

For a while they travelled without further speech, save when an imperious "Brake!" from the Princess indicated that the pace must be checked in order for a corner to be rounded without mishap.

Under the stone viaduct of the railway they flew, winding in and out of pine woods, sometimes catching a glimpse of the golden lights of Riefinsdorf, and sometimes of the moonlit ivory of the mighty Klauigberg.

"You are sure that Father Bernhardt and Dr. Matti must have been killed?" asked Gloria at length.

"Without reasonable doubt. They have gone to their long homes, which, according to all theory, should be widely separated. That's as may be. The man I'm sorry for is poor Karl, who was feeling really happy till I clapped the drugged antimacassar over his head."

Trafford waited to hear his sentiments echoed, but Gloria said nothing. Her silence pained him; under the circumstances it seemed ungenerous.

Then occurred something which cannot be verbally described,—so far as the sensations of the three human beings were concerned; for, to be suddenly checked in a lightning descent and hurled incontinently into deep snow, produces a complexity of emotions incapable of being recorded through the medium of ink. What happened to the bob-sleigh is a matter of more precise fact. The front part struck violently against some hard object, the steering runners were wrenched round at right angles to the body of the sleigh, the whole thing skidded viciously on the ice, and finally buried its nose in the flanking wall of snow.

“Are you hurt, Gloria?” called out Trafford from his couch of crystals, as soon as he had sufficient breath to frame the question.

There was no answer. Within a few yards of him Karl was sitting up with an expression of dazed bewilderment that was almost comic to behold. Trafford rose and made his way with infinite difficulty to the run. Discovering his revolver lying by the side of the track, he picked it up and examined it. It was uninjured and the cartridges still undetonated.

“Gloria!” he called.

“Yes—I’m all right,” came a voice somewhere from the neighbourhood of Karl. “I’m only a bit shaken. I couldn’t answer before. I hadn’t—any—breath.”

“No bones broken?” he persisted.

“None whatever. What happened?”

Trafford was peering thoughtfully at the track.

“Curling-stones,” he answered laconically. “When we enfiladed Saunders’ trench we sent Major Flannel’s

stones on a long journey—but not long enough, it appears. There has been a small avalanche of snow across the track, due, I presume, to the vibration of the guns. This held the stones up in the middle of the fair-way. We might have ploughed through the snow, but the granite smashed us."

"What's to be done?" asked the Princess after a pause.

Trafford stepped over the snow-bank and examined the "bob." The runners were twisted and half wrenched from the wooden framework. The steering-wheel was jammed, and refused to respond to the most strenuous efforts; the brake-lever was snapped off short.

"The midnight express doesn't run any further," he said.

"What on earth are we to do?"

He answered her question with another.

"How's Karl?"

The outraged monarch replied in person.

"I am tolerably well, thank you," he said. "I have been conscious for some time, and have listened with some amusement to your commiserations of my lot. The little catastrophe which has just occurred has dispelled the last lingering fumes of the chloroform with which you rendered me *hors de combat*."

Trafford said nothing, but knitted his brows in perplexed thought.

"We are face to face with a very serious problem," he said after a full minute's meditation. "Gloria, are you sufficiently recovered to join me on the path here, or shall I come and help you out of the soft snow?"

"I will come to you," she answered, suiting the action to the word, and ploughing her deep way to his side. The blonde moustache had parted company with her fair lips, and her fallen shako had released a charming disorder of dark tresses. In her great overcoat, her nether extremities concealed in the snow, she looked once more what she really was,—a young girl of singularly fascinating aspect.

"We can't stay here all night," she said, when she had won her way to the path, "and we cannot well reach the spot where Colonel Schale is awaiting us."

Trafford shook his head.

"Assuming we could walk so far," he said, "and assuming our friend over there would consent to accompany us, we should be overtaken by the pursuit party they are bound to send after us."

"It's all hopeless," she said wearily.

"You have lost confidence in my ability to help you out of difficulties?" he asked.

"You are resourceful—indomitable almost," she conceded, "but you cannot fight Fate."

"I am not trying to."

"But I am. Had it not been for this wretched mishap everything would have been splendid; we should have returned to Weidenbruck with Karl our prisoner. I should have been firmly established on my throne, and you——" she broke off suddenly and added a little sadly: "As it is, we are checkmated within sight of victory."

"You do not blame me for your disappointment? You concede that I did my best?"

His question was dispassionate. She answered it with generous words, but without enthusiasm.

“ You did more than any other man could have done. Indeed, I am not complaining of you; I am complaining of Fate.”

“ Personally, I have a pathetic and unconquerable confidence in Fate,” he retorted.

“ You—yes. But what is my position? Bernhardt is dead, Matti is dead, Karl is our prisoner only so long as he consents to be. You and I are alone,—alone in the dead of night, in a land of snow and frost. We must find shelter, or perish. We must creep down to Riefinsdorf for a night’s lodging, for the road to Wallen is long and will be traversed, for a certainty, by our pursuers. Do you not see now why I complain of Fate? Lying slander has coupled our names none too pleasantly before; what will it say when it has visual facts instead of idle gossip to build upon? ”

“ Slander will say a good deal,” he replied, “ but if we wish to give it the lie, the register of the Chapel Royal can always retort with an unanswerable argument.”

Gloria said nothing. Moonlight, which is infinitely more beautifying than sunlight, had put a strange fire into her eyes, and turned her flesh to clearest ivory. Trafford, had he been a heathen, would have bowed down and worshipped, so goddess-like was her still pose, so unearthly the cold, soft shadows that gave roundness to her cheeks. As it was, he held his breath and clenched his hands in a spasm of passionate appreciation. Was ever anything so fair under the stars, he

asked himself?—did ever such mystic fire burn in human eyes, or frosty breath issue from such perfectly-shaped lips?

In another instant, however, Trafford unclasped his hands, and his fingers trembled, for a great wrath had suddenly mastered him and was shaking his frame as a winter tempest shakes the dead bough of a blasted tree. Gloria,—his Gloria,—who might have loved, who might have fulfilled the mission of her splendid womanhood, had fought down the promptings of her heart and given herself to ambition and the deadening lust of place and power. He felt an almost overpowering desire to seize her roughly in his arms, to break her in his grasp, to crush the supple limbs in an act of ferocious but just retribution. Fortunately his brain steadied itself in time, the mad impulse was checked, and,—as was the way with him,—the paroxysm gave place to a singularly clear and controlled condition of mind.

“Your Majesty,” he called out to Karl, who was still maintaining a recumbent position in the snow, “are you sufficiently recovered from your various mishaps to join us here on the path and discuss the situation?”

For answer Karl struggled to his feet and made towards them. He appeared very pale in the moonlight, but there was the same look in his eyes as when he had faced the rebel throng in the courtyard of the Neptunburg.

“You perceive our difficulties, of course,” Trafford began. “A week ago we set out from Weidenbruck to accomplish a certain object: that object was, in plain language, to wipe you off the earth, or bring you

back bound to the capital. We employed open force, and failed. We employed the gentle arts of abduction, and succeeded—up to a point."

Karl nodded. "I follow you," he said curtly.

"Our motives were frankly selfish," Trafford went on. "The favour of the good Weidenbruckers had to be retained, and it was necessary to do something notable to obtain permanent possession of their good graces." He paused a moment, toyed with his revolver, and looked fixedly at Gloria and then back again at Karl. Then he went on deliberately: "If we return without having killed or captured one, Karl, styling himself King of Grimland, we shall be returning to a nest of hornets. You see my point?"

Karl eyed the revolver thoughtfully.

"Yes, I see your point," he said; "I saw it long before you put it before me. Having failed to abduct me, only one course is open to you. Here I am, unarmed, alone, scarcely recovered from an anæsthetic, shaken by a fall. The moon gives ample light, and your revolver is loaded."

"Precisely," said Trafford. "My course is so obvious! A pressure of the first finger, a puff of smoke, and a brave man groaning in the snow! There are but two objections: firstly, I am not a butcher; secondly, you took it upon you a little while ago to defend the honour of my wife!"

"Your wife?"

"Yes. The lady who is now more or less disguised as a private of the line, did me the honour of bestowing on me her hand in the Chapel Royal of the Neptunburg.

When Bernhardt,—playing his part,—hinted at her shame, your kingly spirit refused to hear ill even of your enemy. For that,—if for no other reason,—I am steering clear of regicide."

Karl passed his hand across his brow, as if the news was too much for his dazed senses.

" You and Gloria von Schattenberg are man and wife? " he gasped.

" On paper," Trafford affirmed, " on paper only. In reality we are nothing to each other, and as events are turning out, never will be anything to each other. But I am a proud man, proud of the secret bond between us, though our vows were meaningless and of no value; and because you took it upon you to defend the honour of my 'paper' spouse, I give you your life and wish you God-speed."

Karl's features twitched in the moonlight, and his breath seemed to come with difficulty.

" You are a generous foeman," he said at length.

" Not more so than yourself," Trafford retorted. " When I,—also playing my part,—swore death to ' the cursed American Trafford,' you vowed you would like me for a guest, with whom to fight old battles over old Tokay. I am fond of Tokay," Trafford went on, " and I am fond of reminiscences; also I know a man when I see one. Karl, King of Grimland, will you give me your hand? "

Karl stretched out his hand and gripped the other's. He seemed searching for words, but no words came.

Trafford read many things in the labouring chest and the dimmed eye, and his heart kindled.

" You call me generous," he went on, " but I am generous with another's property. Grimland is yours or Gloria's; mine it never was. Fate has somehow set me as umpire in a great quarrel; and being holder of the scales I must perforce be impartial. Supposing I trample conscience under foot and do a nameless deed under the moon: suppose we return to Weidenbruck triumphant as Queen and consort, what then? Bernhardt, who understood the temper of the Grimland *canaille*, who ruled them as a rough huntsman rules a pack of hounds—Bernhardt the apostate, the *absintheur*, the distorted genius whose counsels could alone have kept us in power—is no more. Matti is dead—Matti who, as city prefect, did more with his reforming zeal to make the name of Schattenberg stink in the nostrils of the citizens than any enemy could have done. Weidenbruck is yours for the asking! The nobility were never against you; the people were ours only in their meaner moments. You left the capital as a fugitive; you will return as conqueror, and the people will cry, as I cry now: ' Long live Karl the Twenty-second, of Grimland! '"

Still Karl maintained his frozen silence; not a muscle of his face moved. Only, there was a gleam in his eyes that seemed to look beyond the stark pine trunks and the barren fields of snow; that seemed to project his vision over forty leagues of hill and plain to the turbulent city on the Niederkessel, where a shouting throng acclaimed him as their King. For a moment his whole face lit up with a wonderful glow, and then his emotion seemed to master him. He was a strong man, but he

had been through much, physically and mentally, and the last sudden vicissitude of his fortunes won a sharp reaction. His heart beat in great thuds, and the stiff vertical trunks of the forest pines bent and swayed before his eyes. He leaned against a big tree and covered his face with his hands.

Trafford turned and faced Gloria. He expected re-proaches, anger, tears of despair. He had given away her kingdom to her enemy. The strong plant of her ambition he had cut at the very tap-root. He who, by hardening his heart, might have made her a queen, had preferred by an act of mercy to make her a fugitive! He steeled himself against the expected hurricane of bitterness. He looked, and as he looked he rubbed his eyes in amazement. The face of Gloria von Schattenberg was the face he had seen in delirium at the old house at Wallen,—the face of a woman with a loving heart and a soul of flame. The eyes that met his were bright with a splendid joy, overflowing with a great tenderness.

“Gloria!”

She advanced towards him with outstretched arms, a smile on her lips.

He seized her and drew her to him.

“Have I done right?” he whispered.

“Beloved, a thousand times, yes!” she replied. “To-night I see things truly, and I shall never see them otherwise. You have conquered me, hypnotised me, as you nearly did at Wallen; and now there is no Bernhardt to wake me from my sweet dream. The glory of a man is his strength and his courage, but the heart

of a man is his tenderness and his mercy, and it is these that have prevailed with me."

"Herr Trafford!" came a voice from the big pine-tree.

"Your Majesty."

"I am going to make my way back to Weissheim. May I ask what you propose doing?"

Trafford hesitated.

"About that I must consult the Princess," he said at length.

"I am going where my husband goes," said Gloria, "and I am doing what my husband decides to do."

"Then we will make for Riefinsdorf," said Trafford. "To-morrow, early, we will get a smith to mend our shattered 'bob,' and before the sun has climbed above the shoulder of the Klauigberg we will be scudding down the King's highway, 'Youth at the prow and pleasure at the helm.'"

"Towards Wallen?" asked Karl.

"Towards Austria," corrected Trafford. "The road forks at Winterthurm, and we take the southern branch. The Rylvio Pass is steep, and six hours' coasting should bring us to the frontier."

"Needless to say, you need fear no pursuit," said Karl, "but when will you return? You have to be my guest at the Brunvarad and drink my wine. That is part of the bargain."

Trafford smiled.

"It may come to that, some day," he said. "Things move quickly in Grimland. But the time is not yet." He paused, and then went on: "Your Majesty has had

an eventful winter. You have lost a throne and regained it, I believe, more firmly than before. That is, in allegory, the case with me"—he took the Princess's hand in his—"and I am well content."

Karl gazed at the happy pair. Slowly a wonderful smile spread itself over his face, and his eyes shone through a veil of moisture. He seized Trafford's hand and gripped it almost violently.

"Good-bye, brave and generous enemy!" he said; "Good-bye, friend that is to be, that must be, that shall be!" He turned to the Princess, took her in his big arms, and kissed her on both cheeks. "Good-bye, little cousin!" he said. "You are wise and happy in your choice. You have abjured a troubled throne for a kingdom of peace and heart's ease. You are my kinswoman in more than blood,—for you have given yourself to the man whom I am proud to call friend."

He turned and walked up the path as one in a dream. For a moment he staggered in his gait; but he stooped down and rubbed some snow on his forehead, and went on steadily up the hill towards Weissheim.

Gloria and Trafford stood watching him till he disappeared from view.

A little sob broke from the Princess. Then she put her hand in Trafford's, and together they set out towards Riefinsdorf.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

THE LOST SHEEP

IN the small hours of the morning, a party of half a dozen men on skis issued from the courtyard of the Brunvarad. They were weary-looking folk, dull-eyed and taciturn, and without a word they set themselves in motion along the road to Riefinsdorf. The remains of a huge bonfire glowed dully by the roadside, and a pillar of black smoke streamed straight up into the windless air. Where the snow had thawed in a circle round the once festive blaze it had frozen again into lumps of discoloured ice. Dark, recumbent forms showed here and there in the snow, heavy breathing wretches who had gone to sleep, warmed with abundant wine and the glowing flames, but who would wake in the morn to the misery of frost-bite and its attendant horrors. But the little group of ski-ers had no thought for such as these, and they passed them by with scarce a glance. Onward they went without a word, till Meyer tripped up over a sleeping form in the roadway, and broke the silence with a bitter curse, as he dragged himself to his feet.

“Why don’t you go home, Meyer?” suggested Saunders, “you are fagged out, and we may have to sprint later on.”

“If Bilderbaum can go on, I can go on,” said the Commander-in-Chief irritably. “He is ten years older than I am.”

"Five," corrected the General snappishly.

"The pursuit is farcical," said Meyer. "It would have been useless if we had undertaken it at once. At this hour it is a piece of ludicrous folly."

"You need not come," snapped Saunders, who, like the others, seemed to be in the worst of humours.

"Thanks," retorted Meyer. "We must play the game to its weary end. We have shown ourselves fools, and the least part of our penalty is a sleepless night after a restless day."

"We may overtake them yet," said Captain Lexa, who, with two of his riflemen, made up the little party.

"Impossibilities seem possibilities only to geniuses and fools," said Meyer rudely. "It is hardly necessary to state to which category we belong."

"While there is life there is hope," maintained Lexa stubbornly.

Meyer made an exclamation of contempt.

"Supposing the miracle is realised," he said, "and the slower catches the swifter, even then they will certainly outwit us again. In the proverb the tortoise caught the hare—but then the tortoise had brains."

Meyer's sarcasm had anything but a cheering effect on the dismal spirits of the company.

"To think of our never recognising them!" said Saunders bitterly. "To think of Trafford fooling us——"

"Oh, Trafford has imagination and initiative, in strong contradistinction to ourselves!" interrupted Meyer. "He has fooled us before and he would fool

us again twenty times if twenty opportunities were offered him. We are not very clever people, my dear Saunders."

"If we are ever to catch them," said Lexa, "it must be by taking every short cut that offers itself. The road to Wallen winds round in and out of the mountains, and our only chance of overtaking the fugitives is to go straight up hill and down dale, no matter how steep and difficult the track."

Meyer groaned. His legs were aching intolerably, and the thought of breasting a steep ascent on skis almost overwhelmed his flagging spirit. No one, however, answered his groan with another suggestion that he should go back. The Jew had expressed his determination to go on to the bitter end, and nothing but complete physical collapse would stop him. They glissaded swiftly and almost recklessly down the hill-side, and the rush of keen air somewhat quickened their flagging energies.

"Bend to the left!" called out Saunders, himself executing a fine "Christania swing," and thereby just saving himself from charging the snow-wall that banked the bob-sleigh run. The others swung round at his call, and for a time proceeded parallel to the track at a reduced speed.

"Man ahead!" called out Saunders presently; and true enough a dark object was advancing slowly towards them up the path bordering the run. The two soldiers cuddled their rifles suggestively, and the others proceeded at an even pace towards the strange walker of the night.

"A wounded soldier finding his way back," suggested Lexa.

"He may be able to give us information," said Von Bilderbaum.

"Or he may be going to shoot us," said Meyer, prepared as usual for the worst. "Hands up, man," he called nervously, "or we fire!"

The man slowly raised his hands above his head, and continued to plod wearily up the path towards them. In the vague moonlight the newcomer seemed of gigantic stature, and his soundless footsteps suggested a being from another world. On he came with upraised arms and bent head, and then suddenly he lifted his face so that the rays of the sinking moon fell full upon it.

Lexa uttered a cry, but the others stood still in frozen silence, believing they dreamed. Then old Bilderbaum called out hoarsely to the soldiers, "Present arms!" and himself stood stiffly at the salute.

"Must I continue to hold my hands in the air?" asked Karl. "I am very tired."

"Your Majesty!" gasped Saunders.

"Good-evening, gentlemen," said the King, at length lowering his arms. "This is an unexpected pleasure. You are indefatigable."

"Pardon me," said Meyer yawning; "we are exceedingly tired. But as I have been constantly reminding my comrades,—almost to the point of boredom,—we are a pack of fools and must pay for our folly by the inconvenience of a night in the snow."

"If you are fools," said Karl, "I am the king of

fools. But at least there is something noble in your folly, if it leads you from warmth and shelter to a hopeless search over a snow-bound countryside."

"But you have escaped, sire?" said Bilderbaum.

"Yes and no," replied Karl. "When the grand *coup* occurred on the bob-sleigh run I was partially stupefied by the fumes of chloroform. I quickly recovered, however, from its effects, and was even beginning to appreciate the fascinations of a moonlight abduction when an accident occurred to the sleigh."

"You were hurt?" inquired Saunders anxiously.

"No; I fell on my head—which is vastly harder than the snow."

"What happened, sire?" asked Lexa.

And then the King went on to tell that when Trafford enfiladed Saunders' trench with curling-stones he had won the first trick in the game and unwittingly lost the last. That the stones went gaily down the bob-sleigh run en route for Riefinsdorf, and might have gone Heaven knows where had not a subsidence of snow, caused doubtless by the reverberation of the guns, blocked the track. "The snow held the stones up," he concluded, "and the Providence, which manages the unstable affairs of kings and tobogganers, arranged that our runners should strike a large pink stone with a blue ribbon on it."

"Splendid!" cried Bilderbaum enthusiastically. "The 'bob' was wrecked, and the Princess and Trafford being stunned or disabled, you escaped from their clutches."

"Your imagination does you infinite credit, Gen-

eral," said Karl dryly, "but it outruns fact. No one was stunned or disabled; of the three, I was distinctly the most shaken."

"But how—"

"The situation was simple," said Karl. "The 'bob,' as you surmise, was wrecked. My abduction, therefore, was rendered abortive. There were only two courses open to my enemies—to kill me and make their way on foot to Wallen, where their friends were awaiting them, or to set me free and themselves fly the country. Those of you who know Trafford and his charming wife—"

"Wife!" interrupted Saunders.

"Yes," affirmed Karl; "the Princess Gloria was secretly married some days ago to your friend Trafford in the Chapel Royal of the Neptunburg. They are a healthy-minded couple, and they refused to entertain seriously the idea of murder."

"They set you free!" ejaculated Saunders. "Well done, Nervy Trafford! I am not so ashamed of my friend after all."

"He is a splendid fellow," said Karl, "and incidentally, my cousin by marriage. I assure you I for my part am not ashamed of the relationship."

"But where are they now?" asked Meyer.

"They are—where they are. They are free to leave the country without let or hindrance. When things are quieted down and I am firmly in the saddle again, they can come back in their true capacity—as my friends."

"We shall not have to wait long, sire," said Meyer

with an unwonted note of jubilation in his voice. "Even before yesterday's battle the tide was running strongly for you at the capital. Henceforth Weidenbruck and the whole country will be loyal. Long live Karl the Twenty-second of Grimland!"

"Long live Karl!" echoed Saunders, Von Bilderbaum, and Lexa. "Long live Karl!" reiterated the riflemen, raising their shakos aloft on their musket barrels.

Karl stood still, with eyes that swam. He began to speak, but ended with a shake of his head, as if something had choked him.

"To-morrow, dear friends," he muttered very low. "To-morrow. To-night I am tired, very tired and very happy. Long live George Trafford and his beautiful bride!" he said in stronger tones. "God bless them! God bless our poor country! God help me to rule"—but his voice had sunk again to a whisper and as he spoke he reeled against Saunders.

The latter held the massive but limp frame from falling, while someone produced brandy from a flask and poured a generous measure down the King's throat. Then the soldiers made a seat of their crossed weapons, and shoulder-high and supported by willing arms, Karl of Grimland was borne, half-fainting with exposure and fatigue, but serene of mind, to the winter palace of his beloved Weissheim.

EPILOGUE

DOWN the great, white highway of the Rylvio Pass a bob-sleigh was speeding in the early hours of a perfect morning. The incense of dawn was in the air, and the magic of stupendous scenery uplifted the souls of the two travellers. Fantastic peaks of incomparable beauty rose up in majesty to meet the amazing turquoise of the heavens. Sparkling cascades of dazzling whiteness hung in streams of frozen foam from dun cliffs and larch-crowned boulders. The roadway down which the sleigh was coursing with unchecked speed wound like a silver ribbon at the edge of precipices, sometimes tunnelling through an arch of brown rock, only to give again, after a moment's gloom, a fresh expanse of argent domes and shimmering declivities. Perched high on perilous crags were ancient castles of grim battlements and enduring masonry, stubborn homes of a stubborn nobility that had levied toll in olden times on all such as passed their inhospitable walls. Below, in the still shadowed valley, were villages of tiny houses, the toy *campanili* of Lilliputian churches, and a grey-green river rushing over a stony bed to merge itself in the ampler flood of the Danube.

"Oh, could anything be more perfect?" asked Gloria, who, as on the previous night, was doing duty at the wheel. There was a flush on her cheeks that was a tribute to the keen mountain air, and a sparkle

in her dark eyes that told of welling happiness and a splendid conscious joy. Radiant as the morn, fragrant as the pine-laden air, she seemed the embodiment of a hundred vitalities crowded into one blithe being.

"We are on our honeymoon," returned Trafford, "and it would be a cold, dank day that could depress my soaring spirits. As it is, the impossible beauty of our surroundings is so intoxicating my bewildered brain that I am neglecting my duties as brakesman in a most alarming manner. We shall be over a precipice in a minute, if I don't master my exaltation of spirits."

"Perfect love casteth out fear," laughed Gloria.

"Is it perfect?" he asked.

"Absolutely—now, dear," she replied. "From the first you captured my fancy; that was why I did not lie to you in Herr Krantz's wine-shop. Then, when I thought you had killed Karl in the Iron Maiden, my heart grew sick and cold, for I believed you were, as the others, without ruth or mercy. The news that you had saved his life while pretending to take it, put new fire into my soul; but there was ever a war in my breast between true tenderness and the lust of power. I had inherited ambition from a long line of callous ancestors; my whole life had been a tale of scheming, deadening opportunism. And Bernhardt, as we know, with his great domineering personality, was as death to sentiment. And then, last night, well, you took the bit between your teeth and let yourself go. You over-rode my will, you set at nought my interests: you

were master, and I handmaid, and my whole soul went out to you in admiration of your strength, and love of the way you used it."

Trafford drank in the words as he drank in the clear, sweet air of the mountain-side, and happiness—the heroic happiness that befel poets and warriors in the days of the world's youth, when men were demi-gods and gods were demi-mortals—took him with golden wings and exalted him, so that the soaring mountain and the wheeling bird and the forest and the crag and the river were as his brothers and sisters, fellow members of the worshipful company of rejoicing creation.

Onward and downward they flew, while the beams of the rising sun climbed down the valley walls, ledge by ledge and rock by rock, turning brown cliffs to gold, and snowy slopes to diamond and silver. Already they were far below the supreme height of the Weissheim plateau, and the air, dry though it was in reality, seemed almost damp in comparison after the moistureless atmosphere of the lofty tableland they had quitted. The snow held everywhere, but it was the thin covering of an English hill-side in January, not the sumptuous and universal mantle of frost-bound Weissheim. The larch and fir of the uplands were giving gradual place to the stunted oak and the starved chestnut. A thin hedge maintained a scrubby, struggling line at the edge of the roadside, and on the southern slopes the fields were furrowed in endless terraces for the vine.

"We shall reach the frontier in an hour," said Trafford.

“ And then? ”

“ Then we must quit our faithful ‘ bob.’ The road ceases to run downhill at Morgenthal, and a bob-sleigh will not defy the laws of gravity even for the happiest couple in Christendom.”

“ Then what are our plans? ” asked Gloria.

“ Plans! ” he echoed; “ we have no plans. The poor, the unhappy, and the hungry have plans, for they must scheme to improve their condition. But you and I are rich in every gift, and life will be one delicious and unending bob-sleigh ride through gorgeous scenery and vitalising air.”

The Princes sighed luxuriously. Then, after a pause—

“ We must reach the valley some day,” she said.

“ Some day, yes,” he acquiesced. “ Some day the ride will be done, and the road end in the great shadows which no human eye can pierce. But that day will find us hand in hand, with no fear in our hearts, and ready for a longer, stranger, and even more beautiful journey.”

As he spoke the valley widened out, and the hills on either side receded at a broad angle. The roofs of Morgenthal were plain to their gaze, and the tinkling of goats’ bells broke the silence.

“ Austria! ” cried Gloria.

“ Austria, Vienna, Paris, London,” he said, “ Southampton, and then the very first boat bound for little old New York. But in our hearts Grimland—always Grimland.”

